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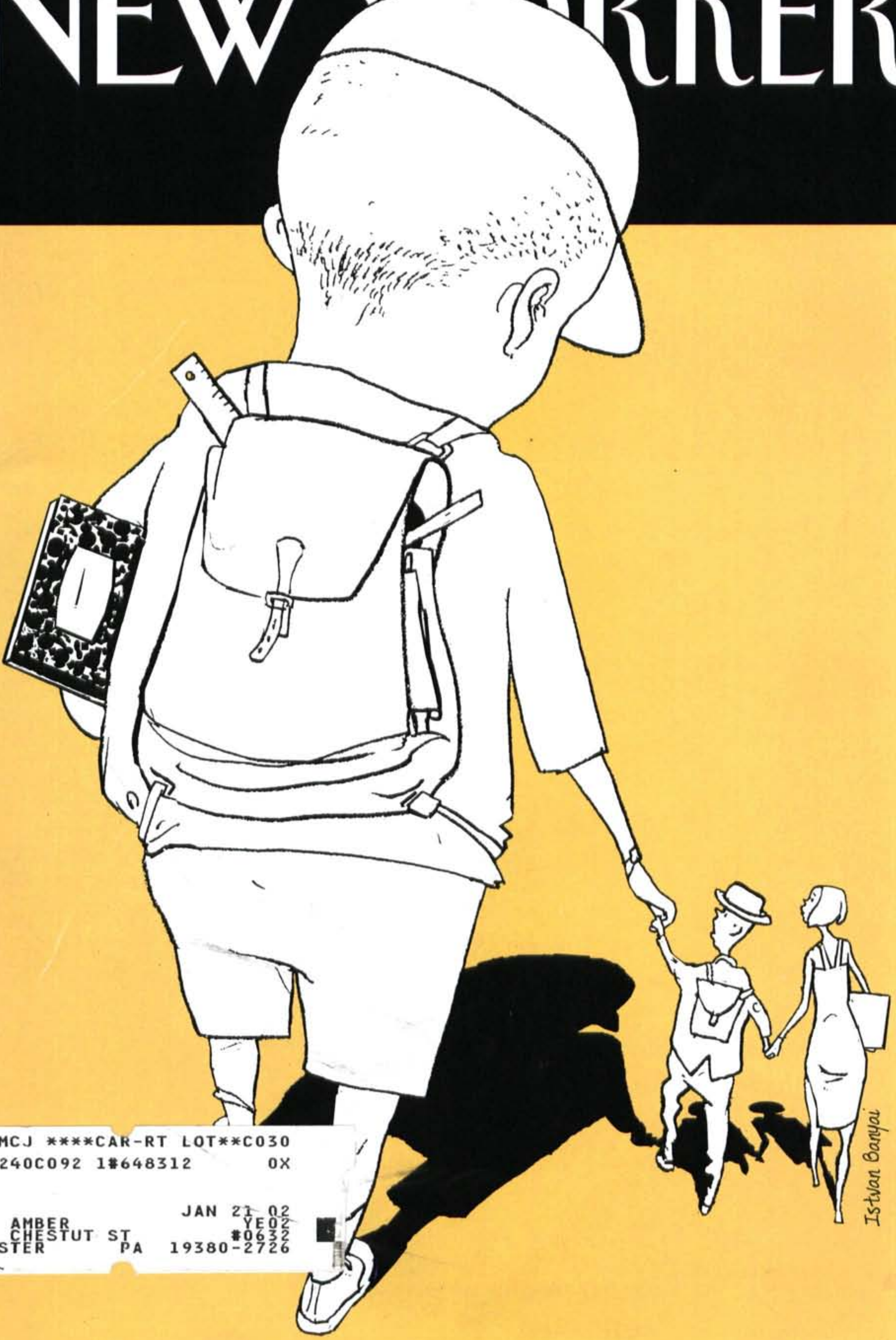
THE NEW YORKER

SEPT. 10, 2001



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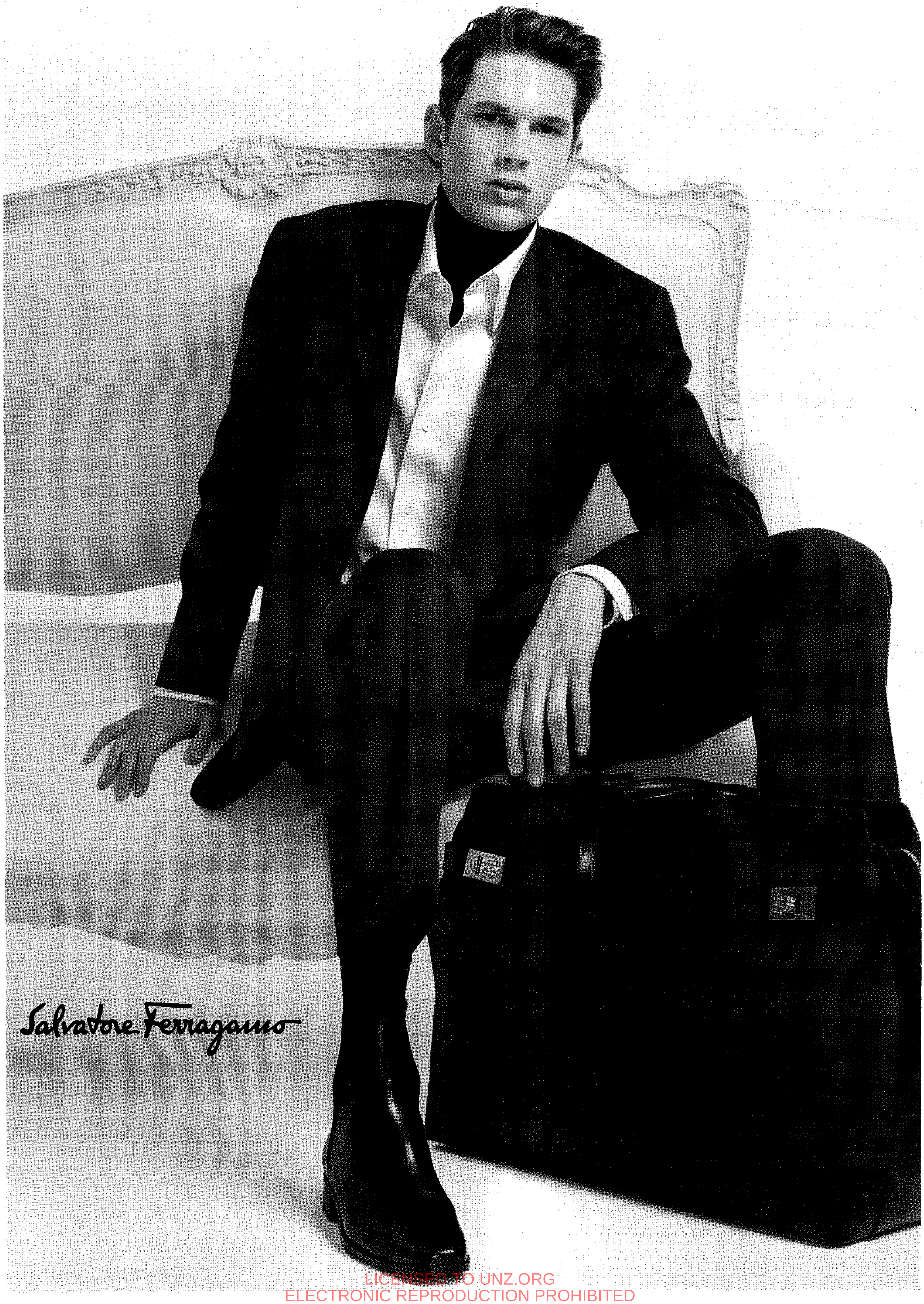
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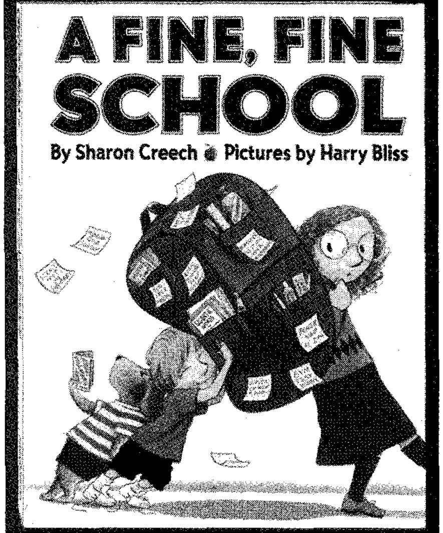
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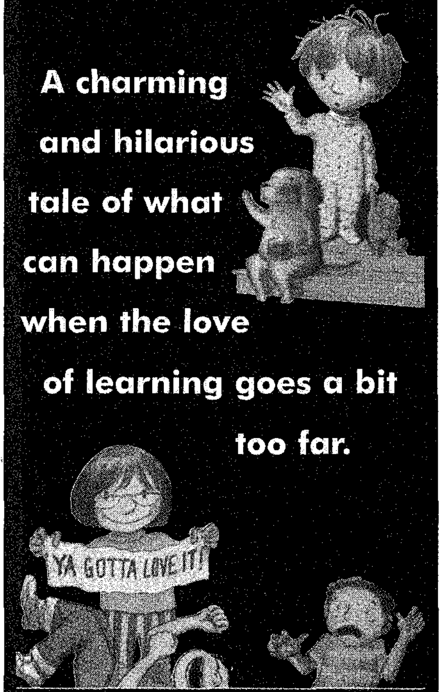
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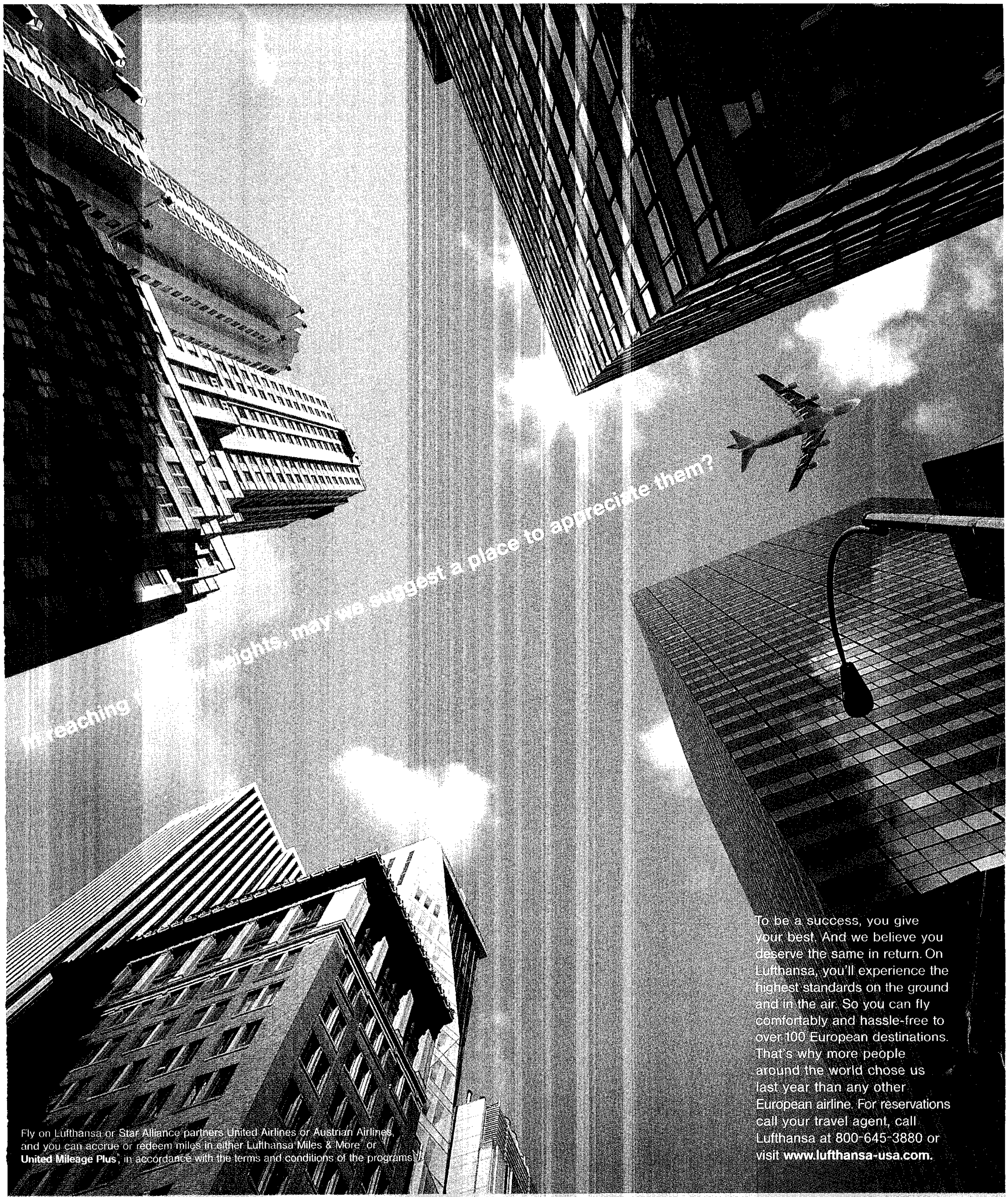

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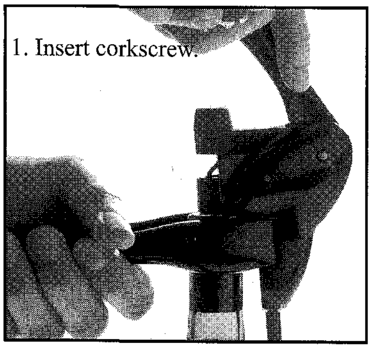

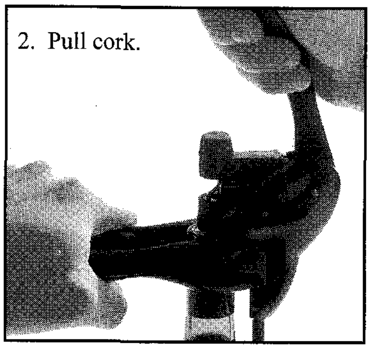

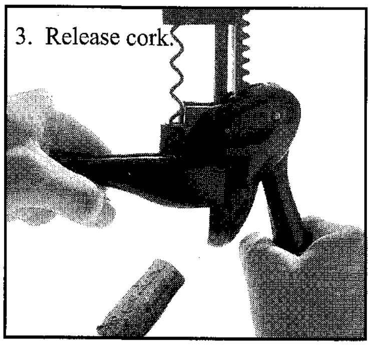

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CONTRIBUTORS

Jon Lee Anderson ("The Revolutionary," p. 60) is a staff writer and the author of a biography of Che Guevara.

Gilles Peress (Photographs, pp. 60, 66, 67, 72, 73, 74) has covered conflicts in Northern Ireland, Iran, Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, and many other parts of the world.

Nicholas Lemann ("William Jennings Bush," p. 44) is the magazine's Washington correspondent.

Tim O'Brien (Fiction, p. 92) is the author of six works of fiction, including "Going After Cacciato" and "The Things They Carried."

Malcolm Gladwell ("Drugstore Athlete," p. 52) is a staff writer.

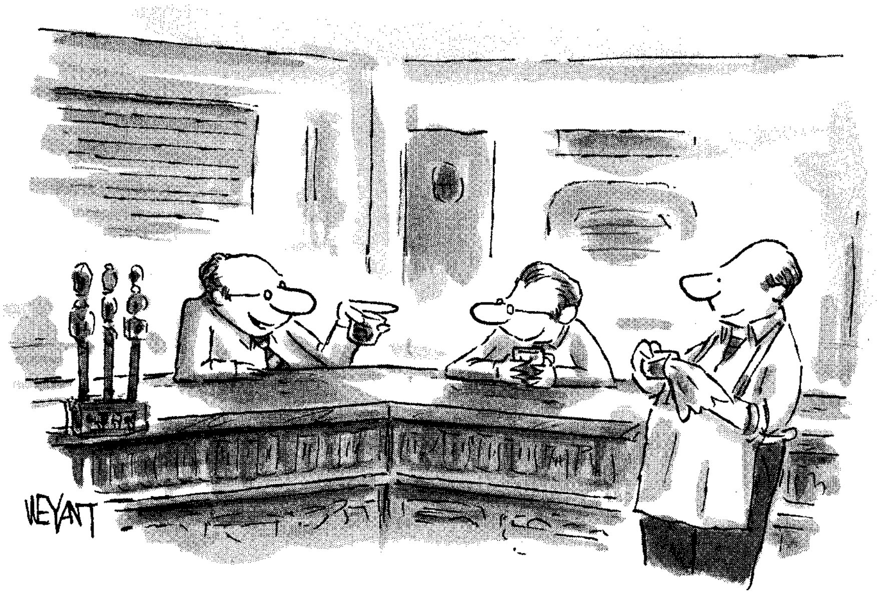
Jonathan Franzen ("My Father's Brain," p. 80) has been a contributor to the magazine since 1994. His new novel, "The Corrections," has just been published.

Susan Rothenberg (Painting, p. 80) will have an exhibition of new paintings at the Sperone Westwater gallery, in New York, in January. She lives in New Mexico.

John Lahr (The Theatre, p. 102) is the magazine's senior drama critic.

Scott Spencer (A Critic at Large, p. 105) has published seven novels, including, most recently, "The Rich Man's Table."

Roz Chast (The Back Page, p. 112) is a cartoonist. Her latest book is "Rationalizations to Live By." ♦



"Now, Clinton—there's a man who knew how to apologize."

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THE MAIL

LEAVING MOUSETAIL

The portrait of the Weems String Band by R. Crumb evoked in me a great sense of pride (Sketchbook, August 20th & 27th). My mother, Mable Weems Gregory, was the sixth child of Jesse Weems, the cellist of the band, and his wife, Mattie. The Weems family lived in Mousetail, Tennessee, on the east bank of the Tennessee River in Perry County. Besides being a self-taught musician, my grandfather Jesse was the village blacksmith, a planter of peanuts, and a maker of moonshine. Then, in 1933, the newly created Tennessee Valley Authority proposed to bring hydroelectric power to communities previously illuminated by coal-oil lamps and by the creative energy of families like the Weemses. Since engineers predicted that the dam-swollen waters would submerge bankside towns, my grandfather and his neighbors were, by eminent domain, compelled to sell their homes and farms and vacate the land. Mousetail vanished. The Weems String Band dispersed, leaving two 1927 recordings, and memories of music played at local square dances, county fairs, and weddings.

The water never reached the abandoned town, however, and, in 1985, the T.V.A. transferred the land to the state, which created Mousetail Landing State Park on the site of the former village. In the park office may be seen today Jesse Weems's blacksmith tools, and what has been preserved of the legacy of Mousetail in the quiet of rural Tennessee.

David W. Gregory
Associate Professor of Medicine
Vanderbilt University School of Medicine
Nashville, Tenn.

HOW TO PLAY THE BANJO

David Gates's piece on the musical contributions of Ralph Stanley was perceptive, but his description of the clawhammer style of playing the banjo that preceded bluegrass was somewhat misleading ("Constant Sorrow," August 20th & 27th). It's not just a single stroke of the finger, followed by an off-beat in which the thumb catches the high-pitched drone of the fifth string; it's two strokes of the finger followed by the thumb (either up-down-thumb or down-down-thumb). This riff emphasizes the two-four rhythm characteristic of most mountain music, while the drone is reminiscent of the music's Scots-Irish roots. Yet the banjo came from Africa, emphasizing once again the mysteries and paradoxes of the best American music and, as Gates writes, the fact that mountain music was never that simple.

Les Daniels
Providence, R.I.

THE OTHER CASTLE

In his journey through Franz Kafka's Prague, Aharon Appelfeld accepts the common assumption that the city's castle is the castle in Kafka's novel of the same name ("The Kafka Connection," July 23rd). But, as Appelfeld himself notes with some dismay, the Prague castle has little resemblance to what Kafka described as "neither an ancient feudal fortress nor . . . a showy modern construction, but rather an elongated estate consisting of a small number of two-story houses and many more squat buildings wedged closely together." Scholars have suggested that the actual site of Kafka's castle is Wossek, a tiny village sixty miles from Prague, which over many years had pressed itself against the portals of the local manor house. It was known to Kafka from visits to his grandfather, who lived there. The close proximity of the Jewish village and the off-limits castle may well have impressed itself on the youngster's mind.

John Ahouse
Curator, Specialized Libraries
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, Calif.

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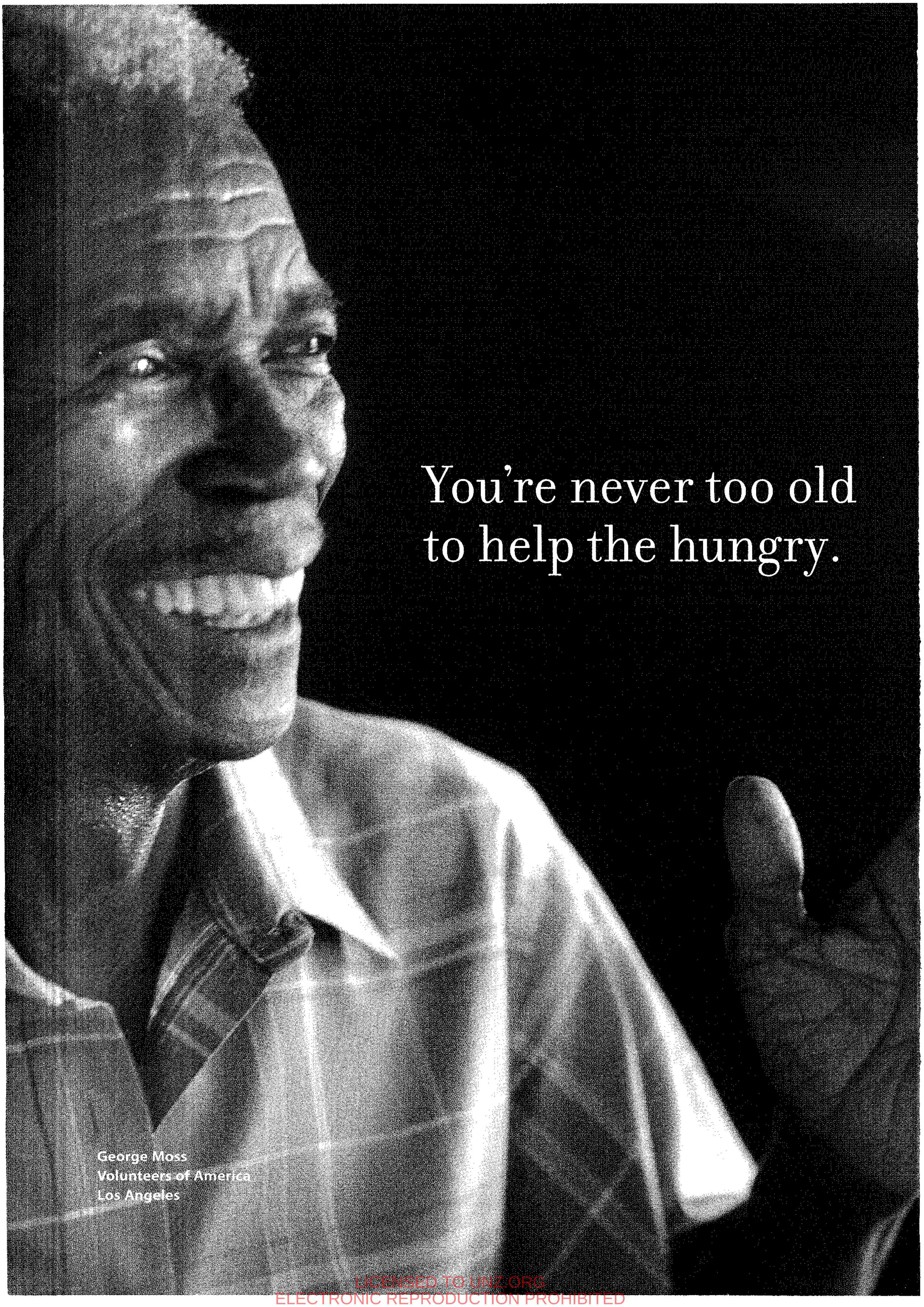
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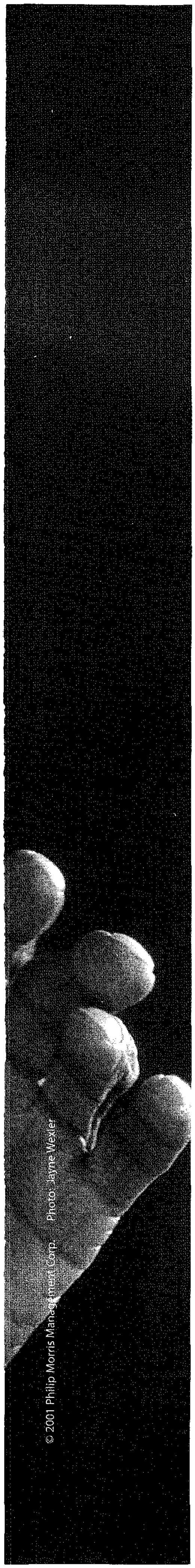
George Moss
Volunteers of America
Los Angeles



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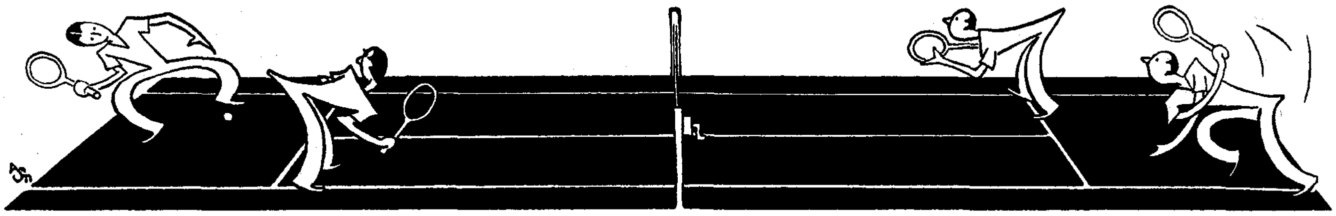

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information

THE DIVISION OF MEMORY
During the final moments of his life, a black American research biologist examines his place in the twentieth century, in a multimedia drama by Clarinda Mac Low, James Hannaham, and Tanya Barfield. Preview on Sept. 6. Opens Sept. 7 at 7:30 and continues through Sept. 23. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288.)

FIRST LOVE
Ruth Maleczech and Frederick Neumann portray two strangers whose lives are transformed by a chance meeting, in a play by Charles Mee. In previews through Sept. 8. Opens Sept. 9 at 3. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 239-6200.)

THE HOLY MOTHER OF HADLEY, NEW YORK
After suffering a nervous breakdown, a small-town woman claims to have been healed by the Virgin Mary, in a black comedy by Barbara Wiechmann. Rachel Dickstein is the director. Previews Sept. 6-9. Opens Sept. 10 at 8. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 206-1515.)

IONESCO FESTIVAL
The absurdist playwright's œuvre, performed by twenty-nine Off and Off-Off Broadway companies, including the Pearl, the Jean Cocteau Rep, the Looking Glass Theatre, and the Sanctuary Theatre. Sept. 6-Dec. 2. (For information about schedules, venues, and tickets, call 387-2043.)

THE LATE HENRY MOSS
A pair of estranged brothers (Ethan Hawke and Arliss Howard) confront each other after the death of their father, in Sam Shepard's latest play. Joseph Chaikin is the director. In previews. (Signature Theatre, 555 W. 42nd St. 244-7529.)

LOVE
The former television writer and producer David S. Rosenthal's first play, which was inspired by his overwhelming desire to bed a particular supermodel. In previews. (East 13th Street Theatre, 136 E. 13th St. 307-1300.)

MANAGERS
A tragicomedy by the corporate headhunter and playwright Kevin Mandel, set at a newly launched talent-management and production company. Opens Sept. 6 at 7 and runs through Sept. 22. (Kraine, 85 E. 4th St. 539-3958.)

RUDE ENTERTAINMENT
Three one-acts by Paul Rudnick ("Mr. Charles, Currently of Palm Beach," "Very Special Needs," and "On the Fence"). The casts include Peter Bartlett, Harriet Harris, and Neal Huff. Christopher Ashley is the director. In previews. (Greenwich House, 27 Barrow St. 239-6200.)

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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RUTHERFORD & SON
The Mint Theatre Company presents Githa Sowerby's 1912 drama, about the heir to a glass factory who tyrannizes his family while trying to save his failing business. Previews begin Sept. 7. (311 W. 43rd St. 315-0231.)

THE SPITFIRE GRILL
James Valcq wrote the music and the late Fred Alley wrote the book for this new musical, based on the 1996 film. Previews begin Sept. 7. (Duke Theatre, 229 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

URINETOWN
Mark Hollmann and Greg Kotis's musical comedy about a city in the throes of ecological disaster, starring John Cullum, has moved to Broadway. John Rando is the director. In previews. (Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

BAT BOY: THE MUSICAL
A kind of "My Fair Bat Boy," in which a half-bat, half-man—memorably played by Deven May—emerges from his childhood cave into adult bourgeois life. But the musical world he enters is one of darkness, not light, of ironies, not idealism, where plot is a history of abdications and song extolls the emptiness of all the standard credos—Christianity, family, community, love, redemption—and of the musical form itself. It's a jejune vision, but a smart, playful, and funny one nonetheless. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/9/01.) (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

BAT THEATRE COMPANY
Presenting five plays in repertory. Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays at 7: Lillian Mortimer's "No Mother to Guide Her." ♦ Thursdays at 7, Saturdays at 3 and 7, and Sundays at 3: Walter Woods's "Billy the Kid." ♦ Mondays at 9, Thursdays at 10, and Fridays and Saturdays at midnight: "Ajax," by Alice Tuan. ♦ Saturdays and Sundays at 1: "Cleveland," by Mac Wellman. ♦ Fridays at 10 and Mondays at 7: "Sincerity Forever," by Mr. Wellman. (Flea Theatre, 41 White St., between Broadway and Church St. 226-2407. Closes Sept. 10.)

BLAST!
A musical extravaganza, which evolved from the drum-and-bugle corps Star of Indiana. (Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200.)

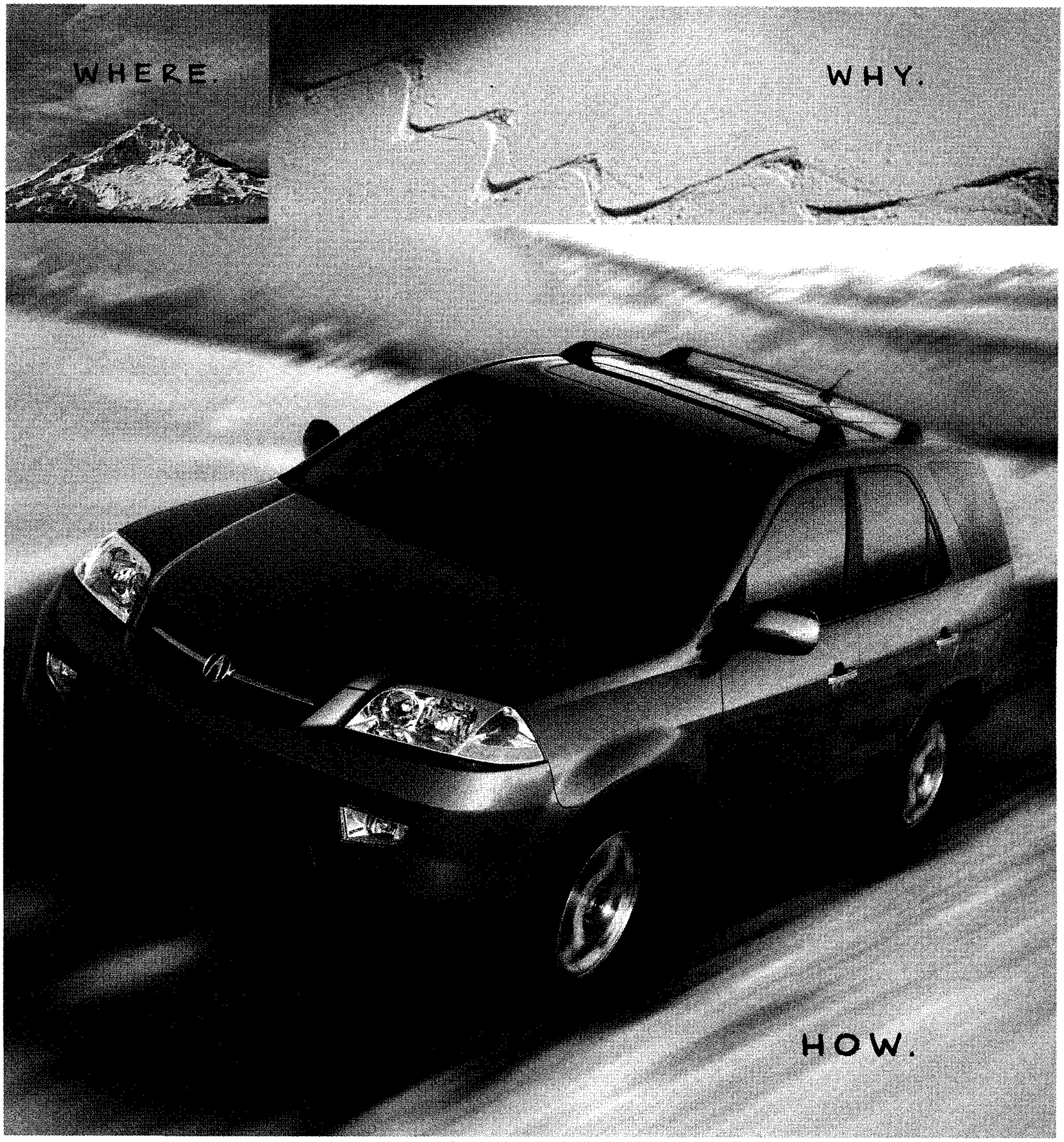
BLUE
In Charles Randolph-Wright's memory play, a trumpet player named Reuben Clark (Hill Harper) returns to his childhood in a small South Carolina town, where his family owns the only African-American funeral parlor, run by his beautiful, narcissistic, upwardly mobile mother, Peggy (Phylicia Rashad). Unfortunately, Reuben's entire transition to manhood—his leaving home, his rejection of the trumpet, his therapy, and his final coming to terms with his mother—takes place offstage. What we are left with is a patina of literacy and boulevard lyricism but no internal life. (7/9/01) (Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. 307-4100. Closes Sept. 9.)

COMMUNICATIONS FROM A COCKROACH
Don Marquis's poet cockroach, Archy, and his pal Mehitabel the cat come to the stage, embodied by Ralph Lee's beautiful and expressive puppets. These tales of New York in the twenties—including a hilariously poignant excursion to Long Island and a ditty about Prohibition—have held up surprisingly well. It's a glimpse not just into the city but also into the tales we all tell ourselves in order to survive in it. Mr. Lee, who adapted the works with Scott Cargle, has created a show that manages to charm kids and make adults smile ruefully. Neal Kirkwood's music, performed live, adds a jazzy, edgy note. (For venue and schedule information, call 479-7710. Closes Sept. 16.)

DOWN SOUTH
In a comedy by Doug Field, the Rattlestick Theatre takes aim at the Cuban-missile crisis. (224 Waverly Pl., at 11th St. 239-6200. Closes Sept. 30.)

42ND STREET
As a domineering diva who breaks her ankle before the big opening night, the wonderful Christine Ebersole steals the show in this revival of the 1980 tap musical based on the 1933 film. But it has to be said: it was probably easy to do. As the young chorine who steps in to save the day, Kate Levering doesn't have enough star power to shine above the legions of hoofers who crowd the stage, and Michael Cumpsty, as the gruff director, is sorely miscast. Still, if this sort of show is your cup of tea, the songs are wonderful and the dancing is fine—just know that the cup is not quite full. (Ford Center, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.)

HELSINOR
At the outset of Todd Alcott's take on "Hamlet," which stars James Urbaniak, the King is still alive and running the country badly. Sheri Graubert, Chuck Montgomery, Steven Rattazzi, and Sean Runnette are also in the cast. (Present Company Theatorium, 198 Stanton St. 420-8877.)



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IF YOU EVER LEAVE ME, I'M GOING WITH YOU!
From the husband-and-wife acting and comedy-writing team Renee Taylor and Joseph Bologna, a play about their thirty-six-year relationship—which has included a wedding reception on "The Merv Griffin Show" and the renewal of their marriage vows five times. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

THE IRISH . . . AND HOW THEY GOT THAT WAY
This revue by Frank McCourt, author of the best-selling memoir "Angela's Ashes," is a generally good-natured if somewhat choppy amalgam of historical tidbits, quotations from letters and speeches, and Irish songs from the past two centuries, performed by a versatile and charming cast of six singers and musicians. McCourt's stories of the potato famine are heart-wrenching, and his view that the privation gave the rather dreamy Irish a hard streak of fortitude lends poignance to his mostly lighthearted portrayal of the travails of Irish-Americans. As in "Angela's Ashes," tragedy is always present, but here even more than in the book it's leavened by achievement and a great deal of humor. Deftly directed by Charlotte Moore. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes Sept. 23.)

LOVE, JANIS
A musical play about Janis Joplin, built around her songs, writings, and interviews. Though it contains no new insight, it's a useful corrective to the drunken, drug-addicted legend, and the production is a fine one. Randal Myler directed with a sure eye for the telling detail, and the seven-member band really cooks. (Village Theatre, 158 Bleecker St. 307-4100.)

MAJOR BARBARA
Cherry Jones, as a major in the Salvation Army, and David Warner, as her rich munitions-manufacturer father, Andrew Undershaft, square off in this revival of George Bernard Shaw's 1905 examination of the social order, under the direction of Daniel Sullivan. Shaw's merry-prankster ironies on the subjects of salvation and capitalism are no less timely today than they were a hundred years ago, but the play has built-in dramatic limits. When it comes to actual human beings, Shaw is perhaps too clever by half; one could say that there is nothing at stake but the future of humanity. Also with Zak Orth and Dana Ivey, who, as the practical matriarch of the Undershaft family, provides unknowingly witty commentary on the essential nature of family values. (7/30/01) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-1300. Closes Sept. 16.)

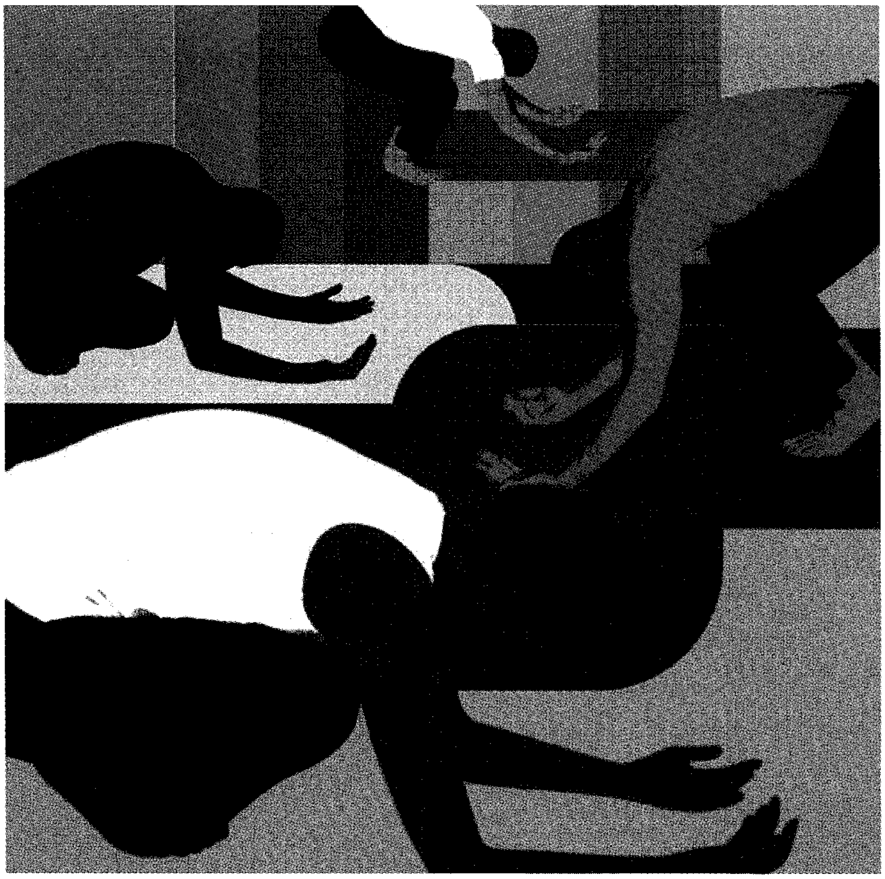
MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING
The Aquila Theatre Company's version of Shakespeare's comedy, set in London in the sixties. (45 Bleecker Street Theatre, at 45 Bleecker St. 529-4530. Closes Sept. 16.)

THE PRODUCERS
High-camp heaven from Mel Brooks, who wrote the music and the lyrics for this monster-hit version of his 1968 movie—in which two scoundrels try to bilk their investors by staging a surefire failure, entitled "Springtime for Hitler." The performing centerpiece of the show is Nathan Lane, as the flamboyant huckster Max Bialystock; his kind of high-amperage panache is in limited supply these days, and both he and the excellent Matthew Broderick, as the hapless accountant Leo Bloom, deliver the mail. Expertly staged by Susan Stroman. (5/7/01) (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

SMALL CRAFT WARNINGS
Tennessee Williams's 1972 play, in a Jean Cocteau Rep production. (330 Bowery, at Bond St. 677-0060.)

STONES IN HIS POCKETS
Marie Jones's play is set in an Irish village where a big-budget Hollywood movie is being made. Conleth Hill and Seán Campion play two extras in the movie and all thirteen other characters as well. Though the play has its clever ways when it comes to sending up both Hollywood and Irish mores, the stories told here aren't anything you haven't seen before. (4/16/01) (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

A THOUSAND CLOWNS
Tom Selleck is the eccentric Murray Burns, in a revival of Herb Gardner's 1962 comedy. John Rando is the director. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)



Sarah Skaggs' "Get Out of the House," alfresco, on September 7.

TICK, TICK . . . BOOM!
The title represents the late author Jonathan Larson's fear of time running out on his musical dreams. The show is set on the eve of the composer's thirtieth birthday—his Walpurgisnacht—as he is caught between the pressures to succeed and to settle. The slick, hardworking cast of three is well directed by Scott Schwartz, and, with Larson's plotline deftly reworked by David Auburn, the production has a fetching modesty and reveals Larson's idiosyncrasy, energy, and promise. (7/9/01) (Jane Street Theatre, 113 Jane St. 239-6200.)

LONG RUNS

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4747.

BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370.

CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200.

CHICAGO
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

CONTACT
Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.

DE LA GUARDA
Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 239-6200.

THE DINNER PARTY
Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

THE FANTASTICKS
Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838.

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY 2001: A SPOOF ODYSSEY
Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.

THE FULL MONTY
Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.

KISS ME, KATE
Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.

LES MISÉRABLES
Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

THE MUSIC MAN
Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.

PERFECT CRIME
Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401.

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

PROOF
Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.

RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000.

THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW
Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.

STOMP
Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 477-2477.

THE SYRINGA TREE
Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 307-4100.

THE TALE OF THE ALLERGIST'S WIFE
Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.

TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING
St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.

THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

DANCE

"SHUNKIN"
Big Dance Theater's ingenious directors, Paul Lazar and Annie-B Parson, have updated Junichiro Tanizaki's 1933 tale of kinky, transcendent love by turning its female protagonist—Shunkin, an impetuous, abusive, seductive, and blind musician—into a present-day rock star. They've added snatches of dialogue from rock documentaries where "people are behaving awfully and perversely," Lazar says, "but then go on to achieve something that the rest of us only aspire to." And Shunkin, played by three actor-dancer-singers in succession, including the adorably odd Gloria Deluxe front woman Cynthia Hopkins, now has a band. "The band hates

JOHN RITTER

her, she's completely shitty to them, and just when everybody's on the verge of tears or homicide," Lazar says, "they go into this sweet, sweet song that feels like the pure product of a harmony between them." Is it anything like the actor-director's own experience in the theatre? "I haven't consciously drawn that connection," Lazar says, "but I think there's something there." (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th Street, at Tenth Ave. 255-5793. Sept. 5-8 at 8. Through Sept. 15.)

"GET OUT OF THE HOUSE"
The New York choreographer Sarah Skaggs stages fluid, entrancing dances in odd places—on a fashion runway in an Atlanta club, at the Elks Lodge in Telluride, Colorado, or in a marble-floored train station in Lincoln, Nebraska—which aim to simulate the effects of street accidents. "When there's an accident on the street," she says, "suddenly there's this pocket of energy—and a huge crowd." "Get Out of the House" begins as the sun goes down on the basketball court at Sara D. Roosevelt Park, off East Houston. "The title works like 'Vote,' like a political slogan," she says. "It's saying, 'Get out of your head.' " Just when you're wanting to get in on the action the six professional dancers take their bows, and the audience is invited onto the court to dance to DJ Red Lips' tunes. Skaggs says, "Paradise isn't this idealized thing. It's real people in front of you, dancing." (Roosevelt Park, E. Houston St. between Chrystie and Forsyth Sts. 924-0077. Sept. 7 at approximately 7. Through Sept. 28.)

"LIFE IS RHYTHM"
This Barcelona-based quintet (three dancers and two percussionists) blends flamenco-flavored tap and African drumming in a full-length work. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. Sept. 7 at 7, Sept. 8 at 2 and 7, and Sept. 9 at noon and 5.)

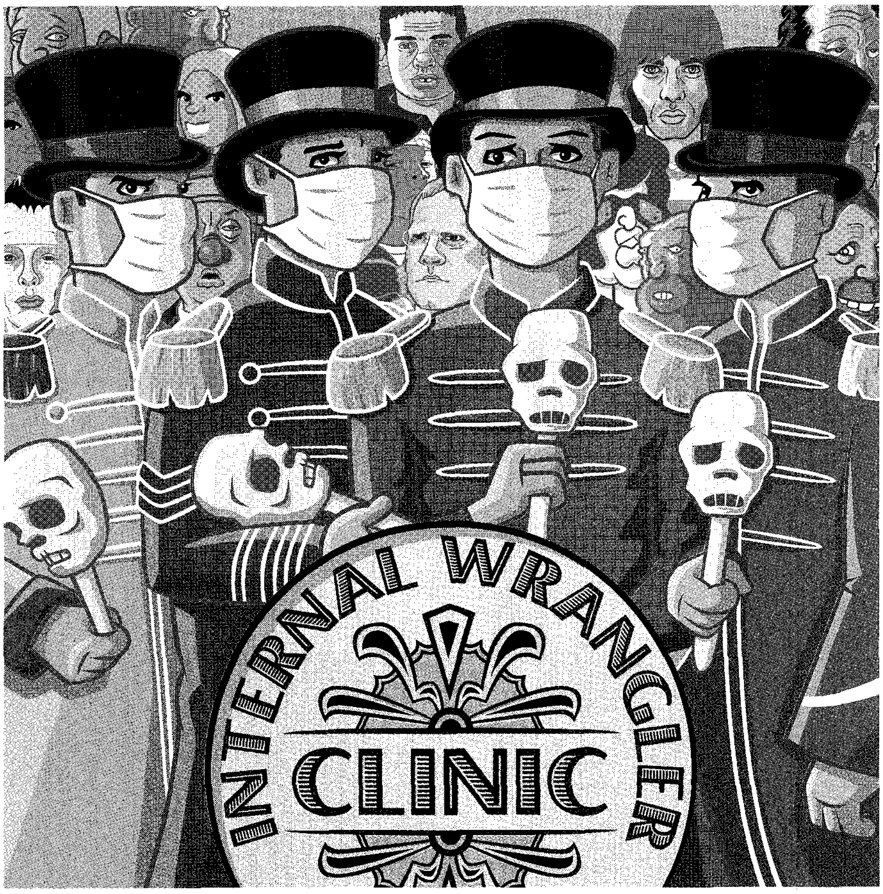
DANCENOWFEST 2001
This five-venue, hundred-and-forty-five-artist festival includes performances at John Jay College, Williamsburg Art Nexus, the Joyce SoHo, the OK Harris gallery, and the Carmine Center. (For schedule information, see www.dancenow.org, or call 718-850-2488.)

"BENCHES AND BIG SILVER"
The Tiffany Mills Company performs a site-specific work at the Central Park Bandshell using tin tubs to play the minimalist score and incorporating the movement of Park-goers in the choreography. (Central Park at 72nd St. No tickets necessary. Sept. 6 at 6 and 7:30 and Sept. 8 at 5 and 6:30.)

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

"MICHAEL JACKSON: 30TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION, THE SOLO YEARS"
The on-again, off-again Jackson Five reunion appears to be settled. After weeks of haggling, Jermaine—who was said to be upset about the exorbitant ticket prices and the fact that the King of Pop refused to donate any proceeds to charity—has relented, and he is now set to take the stage with Jackie, Marlon, Tito, and Michael for the first time in two decades. Joining in the festivities are Marc Anthony, Ray Charles, Whitney Houston, Liza Minnelli, and another hundred-odd singers, screen icons (Marlon Brando), comedians (Chris Tucker), and professional athletes (Shaquille O'Neal). And except for Jermaine's brief crisis of conscience there's been little other complaint about the $2,500 tickets (which are some two grand less if you skip the caviar-and-champagne dinner at Tavern on the Green following the opening night). (Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. Sept. 7 and Sept. 10 at 7:40.)

TENACIOUS D
The comedians Jack Black and Kyle Gass take their twisted underground acoustic-guitar-metal act mainstream with a concert tour and a self-titled début album. The pair's insider status is well established—the Dust Brothers produced the new disk, which includes cameos by the Foo Fighters' Dave Grohl and Phish's Page McConnell, and Spike Jonze is set to direct a video—but is the world ready for them? Seems the answer is yes—this show is sold out. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. Sept. 8 at 8.)



MICHAEL WELDON

The British band Clinic brings its eclectic musical (and sartorial) style to Maxwell's.

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BLARNEY STAR
43 Murray St. (732-2873)—The legendary Scottish singer and guitarist **Dick Gaughan** kicks off the fall Friday-night Celtic-music concert series here on Sept. 7.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Sept. 5: **Jimmy Eat World** offers a more mature but no less compelling slice of post-punk than the pranksters in Blink 182, to whom they are often compared and who happen to be big fans. Sept. 6: **Marc Ribot y los Cubanos Postizos.** Appropriating the arrangements of Arsenio Rodriguez and other pre-Castro bandleaders, Ribot's "prosthetic" Cubans are a postmodern, post-Cold War pleasure. Sept. 8: **Brassy,** a Manchester quartet led by Jon Spencer's sister Muffin which mixes hip-hop and punk rock.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Sept. 11: Probably the most human of the four whiny bands depicted on VH-1's reality show "Bands on the Run," Texas's **Flickerstick** displayed an endearingly shoddy work ethic. With Rex's guitar theatrics, Dominic's burly drumming, and Brandon's soaring vocals, however, their compelling take on alternative rock mitigates their otherwise dysfunctional shenanigans. ♦ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday, with sets from eight until midnight. For information on the Society, call 696-9737.

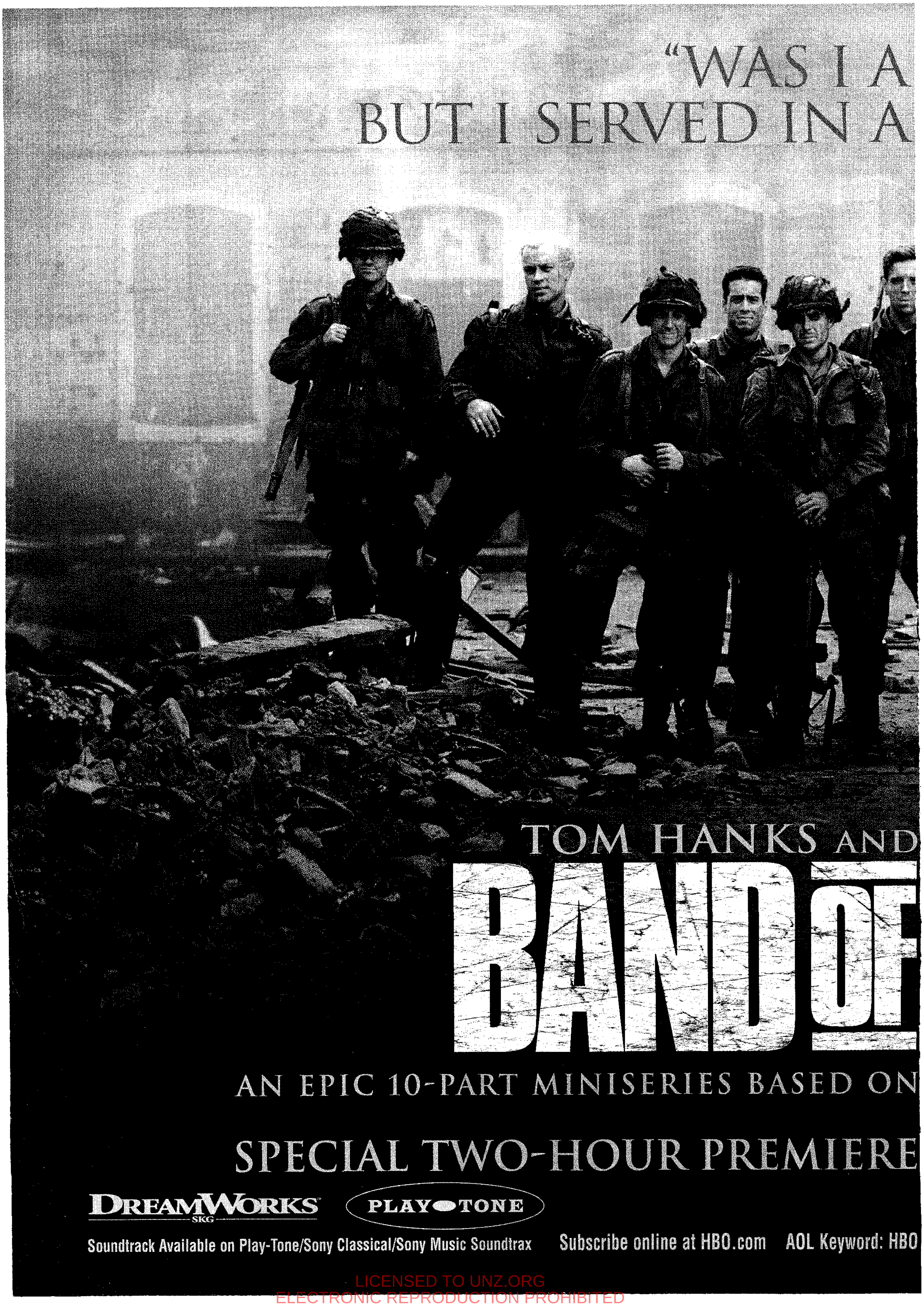
JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—Sept. 10: **Odetta.** The queen of American folk music offers a tribute to Leadbelly.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—The three-woman operation called **Betty** arrives on Sept. 7. Betty's act, a sort of cabaret gone haywire, contains elements of funk and rock music, performance art, satire, and standup comedy. Sept. 10: The techno-laden jam-band music of **Lake Trout** and the funky breaks of the Beastie Boys' longtime keyboardist, **Money Mark,** who will be joined by the Canadian turntablist **Kid Koala** and others.

MAXWELL'S
1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-0406)—Sept. 11: The Liverpool art-rock foursome **Clinic** favors anonymity (they often dress up in "Sgt. Pepper" coats and surgical masks), but they are hardly unknown on the other side of the Atlantic, and among the rock cognoscenti they are considered very cool. The members of Radiohead, no less, are fans of Clinic's eclectic, organ-fuelled surf and of their post-punk strain of rock and roll.

NORTHSIX
66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn (718-599-5103)—The **Heroine Sheiks,** the raucous and wildly fun homespun combo led by the unpredictably antic singer Shannon Selberg (who occasionally blows a bugle), drop by this new Williamsburg club on September 8. The band's sound—dark, heavy, and extremely tight—is augmented by angular rhythms and the punishing, exquisite riffs of the legendary ex-Swans guitarist Norman Westberg. This thoroughly enjoyable group of veterans is proof that rock and roll can still be full of good surprises.

VILLAGE UNDERGROUND
130 W. 3rd St. (777-7745)—Sept. 7: Not the most videogenic pair in the world, the **Proclaimers** are the irrefutably geeky Scottish duo of Charlie and Craig Reid, twin brothers with brogues as thick as the Coke-bottle spectacles they used to wear. More than eight years after their song "I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles)" became a hit (thanks to its use in the 1993 film "Benny & Joon"), the boys are back, sporting stylish wire-framed glasses and a new album. The aptly titled "Persevere" shows that their earnest folk-pop never goes out of fashion. Sept. 8-9: One of the most incendiary punk bands to blast out of Ireland in the late seventies, Belfast's **Stiff Little Fingers** made a name for itself via an un-



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compromising agitprop agenda punctuated by buzz-saw guitars and Jake Burn's incredibly gruff vocals. The group is currently relegated to the reunion-tour circuit (with ex-Jam member Bruce Foxton on bass), and the Fingers' brash brand of punk may have lost some of its timeliness, but the sound is just as urgent as ever.

WARSAW
261 Driggs Ave., Brooklyn (718-387-5252)—Sept. 5: **Bonnie Prince Billy,** né Will Oldham, stops by Brooklyn for the opening of this new outer-borough concert hall in the Polish National Home. In the early nineties Oldham's songs, which he recorded under the name of Palace Brothers, were weird, raw, and Appalachian, but lately they have turned into mellifluous ballads. His lyrics, however, are still obscure, dominated by references that are as wide-ranging as they are strangely touching. Live, he can bellow or whisper, depending on the night, but he's always completely sincere.

WETLANDS
161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—Sept. 7: Reconvening in honor of the downtown venue that helped give birth to their careers and the neo-hippie jam-band scene, the once fêted **Spin Doctors** return to Wetlands, which, after thirteen years in the business, is closing its hallowed doors later this month.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Going out on a limb, musically speaking, is **Joe Lovano's** habit, but his nonet (appearing here Sept. 5-8) gets his feet back on the ground. In this exceedingly polished ensemble, the ace saxophonist explores vintage bebop and swing bolstered by the agile charts of the once obscure Cleveland jazzman Willie (Face) Smith, whose impressive work with Lovano has put his name firmly on the map. Dining.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Sept. 9: Even the best work of the Brazilian songsmith **Ivan Lins** can't make you forget Antonio Carlos Jobim, but Lins's pleasant way with suggestive harmonies and buoyant rhythms cuts through the slickness of his pop-fusion presentation.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (582-2121)—Through Sept. 9: The **Pharaoh Sanders** quintet. With soulful balladeering now tempering his titanic eruptions, Sanders has become the complete saxophonist. It's been quite an evolution for the roaring iconoclast who once made even late-period Coltrane sound reserved; rather than have them running for the doors, Sanders' colossal tone and naked emotivity on tenor and soprano now embrace audiences openheartedly. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

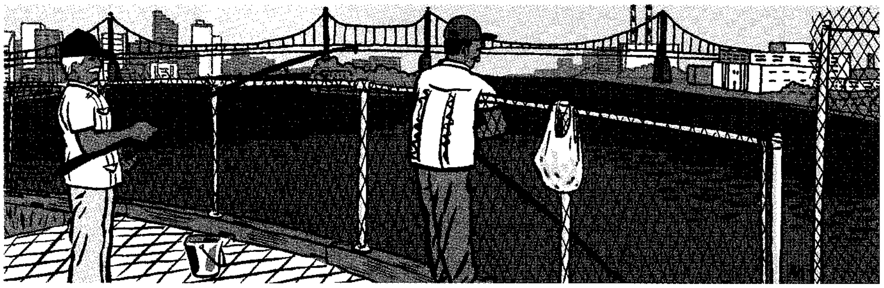
KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Sept. 6-8: The **Tom Varner** quintet. Varner gives his still-out-of-the-jazz-mainstream French horn the fluency of a bounding trombone. He's also a versatile composer who has successfully mined the more lyrical suggestions of Ornette Coleman's work.

UP OVER JAZZ CAFÉ
351 Flatbush Ave., at Seventh Ave., Brooklyn (718-398-5413)—Having come through on the substantial promise he showed with, among many others, Leon Parker and Chick Corea, the poised alto saxophonist and flute player **Steve Wilson** (here with his quintet featuring the saxophonist **Vincent Herring,** Sept. 7-8) has glided past trustworthy-sideman status straight into the big leagues.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Sept. 9: Their duet recording "Freefall" was one of the more surprising artistic successes of this year, so expectations run high for the live partnership of the pianist **Kenny Barron** and the violinist **Regina Carter.** Both are frisky improvisers who enjoy straying down the thornier paths of the harmonic garden. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

EXCURSIONS

A Fine Line



It's a Saturday in August, and Anthony, a New York City traffic cop, is assembling his fishing poles by the East River. He's chosen a patch of shoreline which "looks fishy," but perhaps he's letting his nose do the thinking—he's just north of the Fulton Fish Market, near the lower end of Manhattan. Trucks rumble overhead on the F.D.R. and bird droppings cover the ground. The river smells like spoiled milk.

Anthony is fishing for "anything that bites," and he's been lucky before. "I took my mother here once on her birthday, and we caught forty-five fish," he says. His equipment includes a blue cooler packed with soda, a radio tuned to Hot 97, and a large serrated knife for cutting bait. Last year, using some live clams he bought on Delancey Street, he caught a thirty-four-inch striped bass at this exact spot. Anthony didn't eat the fish, but he gave it away to someone who did.

Striped bass in the East River may seem like tourists who have taken a wrong exit off the Atlantic Ocean, but these fish are more like seasoned commuters skylarking on a back road. The East River, which is technically a saltwater estuary, connects the Long Island Sound with New York Harbor, and, although it's certainly polluted, a little pollution translates into a lot of things for fish to eat. During times of peak migration, especially the fall, the river is rich with blues, stripers, fluke, weakfish, and whatever else decides to follow along.

About ten blocks north of Anthony's spot is where the East River Park begins, a thin slice of green that runs about twenty blocks along Manhattan's eastern edge. The park seems neglected and lawless, with its worn-out ball fields, unleashed dogs, and a decaying amphitheatre covered with graffiti. Around Grand Street, a fisherman dressed in black has tied his pole to the railing and clipped a little silver bell to the top of it. "When the bell rings," he says, "you've got a fish." He's been fishing here "only" six years. "I used to fish at Sixth Street, but that got closed down," he adds. "A lot of the old guys are fishing up at Twentieth Street."

The loss of Sixth Street must have been quite a blow for urban anglers—a support tower of the Williamsburg Bridge creates an enormous eddy in the river there, where fish can hold position effortlessly on the edges of the swirling water and then dart out to swallow whatever floats by. But city officials had the promenade cordoned off before the Fourth of July, fearing that the weight of fireworks gazers would collapse the bulkhead.

The old guys get to Twentieth Street by skirting the highway. Behind a metal fence, the river bubbles up like an enormous Jacuzzi. Two men speaking Spanish sit on bicycles and cast hand lines into the foaming water. "This is a good place for big fish," one of them says, pointing to the towers behind them. "Con Edison." The electric plant discharges its warm outflow here, and the warm water must bring the lunkers. "We got one last night," the man says. "Big fish." He spreads his arms as wide as he can.

It's the second-oldest fish story: the secret hole where the monster fish lie—or where, at least, they *were* lying the day before, when you really should have been fishing. It's comforting to hear it once more, on the shoulder of a highway at the edge of the city. The waters of Manhattan offer the same thing water does anywhere else—mystery, depth, blue, green, and, maybe, dinner.

—*Michael Agger*

MATT MADDEN

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—**"Beyond the Easel: Decorative Painting by Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis and Roussel, 1890-1930,"** which traces the careers of the four post-Impressionist painters, is the visual equivalent of a beach book. But it's more Jackie Collins than Tom Clancy. The imagery these artists preferred—cozy interiors, cavorting poodles, outings at the beach—looks far from radical today, but in fin-de-siècle France the infusion of art into everyday life was groundbreaking. Much of the work was commissioned for private homes; a pair of torchères designed by Lucien Levy-Dhurer flanking the entrance signals the decorative, domestic theme. (In a related but misguided strategy, the gallery walls are painted in murky period colors: oxblood and deep teal.) Of the four artists, Vuillard fares best. Though his compact, mosaiclike brushwork can cloy, in a painting like "Windows Overlooking the Woods," a sweeping view of the French countryside, it takes on the knotty magic of a tapestry. Through Sept. 9. ♦ Museumgoers en route to the new Jacques and Natasha Gelman galleries pass permanent displays of twentieth-century European painting, including a timeline of Picassos (from the completely blue "Blind Man's Meal," from 1903, to the ebullient "Dreamer," from 1932, a lavender-bellied woman rolling in grass and flowers), Balthus's "The Mountain," and Modigliani's portrait of Juan Gris. The Gelmans' recently bequeathed collection, which inaugurates the rechristened space, complements the ongoing exhibit: Picasso's small, simple 1906 self-portrait; Balthus's well-known, inner-thigh-and-underwear-baring "Therèse Dreaming"; and Juan Gris's "Juan Legua" each complete thoughts begun next door. The collectors' weakness for Surrealism is represented by a few noncanonical Dalis and some cheerful larks from Tanguy and Miró. Through Feb. 3. ♦ **"African, Oceanic, and Ancient American Art."** This smattering of recent acquisitions includes a vitrine of metal crosses from the Congo and a protective scroll from nineteenth-century Ethiopia. Several sets of photographs let viewers meet the ghosts of Africa past, in studio portraits from the twenties and sixties and in a memorable image of a mission outpost in Madagascar, its grounds teeming with people and the sky crowded with white-peaked buildings. Through Oct. 28. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—An antidote to Gehry fever, the first half of the Mies van der Rohe extravaganza has opened with "Mies in Berlin." Matching its subject's famous simplicity, the show is a calmly paced bildungsroman, tracing a thirty-year progression from Schinkelesque prodigy to modernist master. Understandably, the show's curators, Terence Riley and Barry Bergdoll, worried that canonical projects like the Tugendhat House and the Barcelona Pavilion might seem too familiar. Their decision to freshen things up with Thomas Ruff's cloying colorized photographs is the show's only lapse. Otherwise, it's easy to fall under the spell of Mies's planar vision, his integration of landscape and garden design (more suited to a Californian than a Germanic climate), and his infectious love of *betonte Leere*, or heightened emptiness. A complementary show (at the Whitney) picks up where this one leaves off, with Mies's arrival in the United States in 1938. Through Sept. 11. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—Selections from the permanent collection are on display. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—For his first New York retrospective, Wayne Thiebaud's career has been served up in four courses, beginning with dessert. During his pastry period, Thiebaud turned cafeteria fare—not just wedges of cake and pie but a whole alphabet of prepared foods—into something enduringly wry and lovely, a celebration of everyday artifice. The stiff and studied portraits that follow are the show's weakest moment, but Thiebaud returns to form in the subsequent cityscapes and farmland scenes, creating steep, unapologetic Arcadias. There are echoes of Hopper, Diebenkorn, and Johns throughout, but none of Thiebaud's predecessors have his cool, confectionary jauntiness. Through Sept. 23. ♦ Picking up where MOMA's more engaging early-Mies exhibition leaves off, **"Mies in America"** looks at how the Master of Less and the Culture of More altered each other. Focussing on a few major commissions—among them the Lake Shore Drive Towers, in Chicago; the Seagram Building; and the Chicago Convention Hall—the exhibition offers a kind of dry immersion in Mies's immaterialist aesthetic. With acres of bland drawings and only a few models, this show isn't going to change many minds: skeptics will leave with a renewed conviction that Mies's buildings are three-dimensional graph paper. But the lucid wall texts, prepared by a curatorial team led by Phyllis Lambert (who first worked with Mies as the client for the Seagram Building), remind us that his simple effects depended upon a host of tweaked, ingenious details. Through Sept. 23. ♦ The Tower of Babel has nothing on the Whitney this month, as Joseph Grigely transforms the lobby gallery into a chapel of white noise. The artist became deaf at the age of ten, and conducts conversations with nonsingers through notes scribbled by them on scraps of paper. Grigely can speak, so we read only one side of the dialogue, ranging from a series of chitchat non sequiturs ("loud wind now" followed by "Wim Wenders, too") to emphatic declarations ("I want 10%"). More than twenty-five hundred of these scraps are installed floor to ceiling in the oval space, the visual equivalent of a drone. Through Sept. 9. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, Fridays, 1 to 9.)

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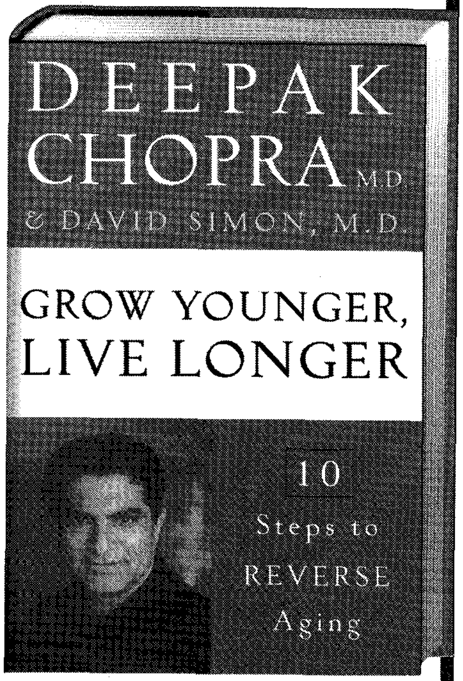

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AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—"**The Genomic Revolution**" is as stagy as the museum's permanent wildlife dioramas and as wired as the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Throughout the dark, labyrinthine exhibit, sound bites from scientists and Everymen overlap with a soundtrack of doubt-fostering minor-key hums and beeps. The tone tends toward boosterish enthusiasm for progress, with an occasional raised eyebrow; pronouncements like "Our perception of medicine and ourselves is forever changed" are spoken within hearing range of explanations of why it might be unwise to clone Rex

POP NOTES

HE'S DOIN' IT AGAIN

In the eighties and early nineties, Bob Dylan's inconsistency was something of a joke. He would release a fecund record hailed as a comeback ("Empire Burlesque," in 1985; "Oh Mercy," in 1989), and then follow up with a phoned-in piece of pap that even his most ardent apologists couldn't defend ("Knocked Out Loaded," in 1986; "Under the Red Sky," in 1990). Dylan was both a genius and a dimwit: what versatility!

So there has been understandable trepidation hovering around the release of **"Love and Theft"** (Columbia), Dylan's first effort since 1997's praised-to-the-skies "Time Out of Mind." But true contrarians don't stick to their contrarian patterns, and "Love and Theft" instantly dispels any thoughts of superficiality with the rollicking "Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum," a surreal rockabilly number that comes off as an older and crankier cousin of "Highway 61 Revisited."

"Tweedle Dee" is sneakily profound; like the rest of the record, it has a light touch, both musically and lyrically. The idiosyncratic, jazzy ballad "Po' Boy" includes two jokes that seem targeted at first graders ("Called down to room service, says 'send up a room' "; "Knockin' on the door, I say 'Who is it, where you from?'/Man say 'Freddie,' I say 'Freddie who?'/He say 'Freddie or not, here I come' "). Upon closer inspection, of course, the songs are hardly buoyant: throughout, Dylan frets about age, treachery, and the galling puzzle of mortality. "Time Out of Mind" met the problem head-on, with sweeping, cinematic songs like "Tryin' to Get to Heaven" and "Not Dark Yet." "Love and Theft" is slipperier.

While the first third of the album sometimes relaxes into standard ballads and blues, "Love and Theft" picks up speed, and power, after that. At least three songs should be quickly promoted into the Dylan pantheon. "Highwater (for Charlie Patton)," which rides a jaunty banjo line and seems to recall the Mississippi flood of 1927, is also a kind of pocket-sized "Anthology of American Folk Music," quoting "Dust My Broom," "The Cuckoo Is a Pretty Bird," and others. "Moonlight," which follows directly behind it, is the album's gentlest song, Dylan's stab at a Depression-era standard like "Walking My Baby Back Home." And "Sugar Baby," the seven-minute album closer, is the album's most successful (if also its most self-conscious) epic, a rueful dirge with impossibly pessimistic lyrics ("Every moment of existence seems like some dirty trick").

In part, "Time Out of Mind" succeeded because of its over-all coherence; here, at least two of the stronger songs seem like odd men out. The beautiful "Mississippi," an outtake from "Time Out of Mind," is polished to a sheen, and it seems to belong with a set of more impeccably produced songs. And "Honest with Me," which appears late in the record, sandwiched between "Moonlight" and "Po' Boy," is an old-fashioned rock-and-roll raveup: it sounds as if a dirtier, meaner bunch of musicians have suddenly burst into the room, rousted Dylan's quirky little folk-jazz ensemble, and set the whole place on fire.

—*Ben Greenman*

or Muffin. (For one thing, two calico cats with the same genes would be unlikely to have the same pattern of spots.) Touch-screen surveys tabulate visitors' responses to controversial questions, and the museumgoers prove much more enthusiastic about genetic technologies than respondents in a recent national sample—at last count, thirty per cent of the visitors would replicate a person. Through Jan. 1. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
Seventh Ave. at 27th St. (217-5800)—**"Infinity: The Textiles of Akihiko Izukura."** Izukura's creations aren't tidy: they wrinkle and pucker and drip uneven knotted strings of various textures and weights, the results of his unusual pledge to use every part of a bolt of cloth, whether he or someone else has woven it. That approach makes sense for the translucent scarves and kimonos here, but it doesn't work as well with Izukura's more Western-influenced clothing, which can be as incomprehensible as the documentary about him which plays in a back room, in Japanese with Japanese subtitles. Through Sept. 15. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, noon to 8; Saturdays, 10 to 5.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 104th St. (534-1672)—**"Dressing for a New York City Childhood."** The photographs that line the entry to this collection of period clothing and accessories introduce viewers both to the children who wore the outfits and, in a Jacob Riis image of a sweatshop, the children who made them. Oil portraits and cartes de visite show well-dressed children of the Gilded Age, including the colorful siblings Gifford and Rosamond Pinchot and a young man who grew up to give a gold mine to Trinity Church. In the vitrines, tot-size torture devices (such as tiny clogs, corsets, and hoops) are accompanied by a nearly up-to-date school uniform, in tracksuit-like fleece, and a double-breasted Bar Mitzvah suit, once worn by the donor's son, David Kaley, who, at twice that age now, might have imagined he'd outgrown the embarrassment. Through Sept. 16. (Open Wednesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 5; Sundays, noon to 5.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF DESIGN
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (369-4880)—Red Grooms, the artist who put the Pop in pop-up, gets a mini-retrospective of his prints on the museum's fourth floor. Best known for the elaborate, life-size constructions that he calls "sculpto-pictoramas," Grooms has been experimenting with lithography since 1956, at the same time that he was frolicking in happenings with the likes of Allan Kaprow and Claes Oldenburg. Over a hundred works on paper are on display, including the winningly titled "Aarrrrrrhh"; a fire engine with a 3-D ladder, from 1971; and the artist's own wedding invitation, from 1987. Through Nov. 11. (Open Wednesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5, and Fridays, 10 to 6.)

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN
1 Bowling Green (668-6624)—In the opening, lenticular photograph of **"Spirit Capture,"** an exhibition of photographs of Native Americans taken between 1845 and 2001, the eyes of the subject, Geronimo, appear to flash, but only because there are two sets of them, printed one over the other. From some angles, his solemn gaze welcomes viewers; from others, his hardened stare warns them off. The mixed messages continue in the rueful captions under many prints, which include formal state portraits of early Native American emissaries to Washington. There are plenty of patronizing images from popular culture (Shirley Temple visiting a tepee, the overcostumed cast of "Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show"), but attempts at irony fall flat. The voice-over for the "lantern slide show," a collection of reservation photographs, supposedly re-creates the monologue given by one Clara Churchill to various ladies' groups, but the voice is far more shrill than even a church lady deserves. Through July, 2002. (Open daily, 10 to 5, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
583 Broadway (219-1222)—If Big Brother opened a video arcade it might resemble "The Electric Donut," the digital-game room set up by Kristin Lucas and Joe McKay in the museum's lower-level media lounge. The decorating scheme runs to surveillance cameras and microphones, and instead of Pac Man or Donkey Kong the games include a fingerprint scanner ("If you're innocent you have nothing to hide") and "Summer in New York," in which viewers are invited to blow up an ice-cream truck with hand grenades. Free coffee is available for viewers not feeling sufficiently wired. Through Sept. 16. (Open Wednesdays and Sundays, noon to 6; Thursdays through Saturdays, noon to 8.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Buzz Club: News from Japan."** Part of the first floor here has been converted into a seventy-foot-long beehive, which explains the "buzz" in the show's title. Lilliputian installations by Japanese artists and designers are crammed into hexagonal cubbyholes like commuters on a rush-hour train. Technology dominates, as customized cell phones (heavy on Hello Kitty-style cuteness) join the requisite Web projects, music videos, and *anime* cartoons. Viewers are invited to crawl into some of the mini-galleries, but only the extremely young at heart or slender of hip are likely to be tempted. Through Sept. 30.

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (864-4500)—**"For the Record"** brings the studio into the museum with work from three young artists-in-residence, Julie Mehretu, Senam Okudzeto, and Nadine Robinson. The loudest work is Robinson's: a shag canvas of human hair, coupled with a wall of speakers playing snippets on a mass of turntables. Mehretu and Okudzeto offer more traditional drawings and paintings. Okudzeto's inky silhouettes seem equally influenced by Kara Walker's cutouts, Chris Offili's Afro inkblots, and the opening credits of a James Bond movie. Through Sept. 16. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 6; Fridays, noon to 8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES-UPTOWN

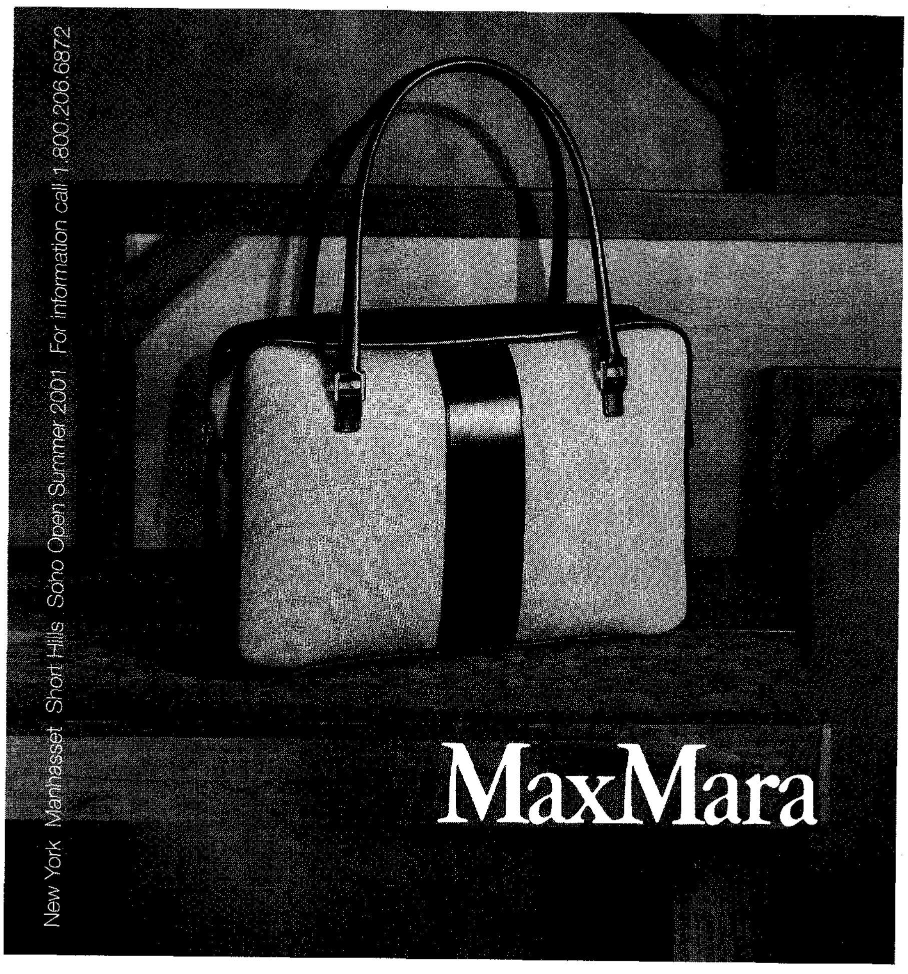
Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

ABRAHAM J. BOGDANOVE
Nearly fifty works by the generally sunny Bogdanove (1886-1946), who dedicated himself to painting Monhegan Island, Maine. The bulk of the paintings depict large, golden rocks in teal-and-white waters in the flurried strokes of Impressionism's aftermath. Through Sept. 8. (Spanierman, 45 E. 58th St. 832-0208.)

RICHARD SERRA / TOM WESSELMAN
It's hard to imagine two artists whose works have less to say to each other: Serra, whose steel monuments have a nearly puritanical solemnity, and Wesselman, the most libidinous of Pop hedonists. Here, though, an accidental connection emerges. Serra's lithographs of inky ellipses resemble the smoke rings that drift from the mouths of Wesselman's svelte nudes. Think of it as Cotton Mather and Hugh Hefner sharing a cigarette. Both shows through Sept. 7. (Danese, 41 E. 57th St. 223-2227.)

GALLERIES-CHELSEA

"LARGER THAN LIFE"
Like an old men's bar, this group show includes some charismatic veterans and some genteel duffers. In the latter category there is Aristodimos Kaldis, an eminently likable sort of Greek Chagall. But the spotlight belongs to Paul Georges and Leland Bell, two very different éminences grises of the New York School. Georges is the Dionysian one: the electric lime-green squiggles of his "Calla Lillies" are gleefully blinding. Bell is the Apollonian control freak, turning domestic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TIME TRAVEL *Seeing speeding I.R.T. Redbirds is not an everyday occurrence for a nineteenth-century-style tintypist—he's more at home in the smoky tents of Civil War-battlefield reënactments—but last autumn the Transit Museum commissioned John Coffer to photograph the brass chandeliers and Guastavino arches of the long-closed City Hall station. The results, on show at the Viewing Room's new Chelsea home, show unfathomable (and unreproducible) richness of tone. Photograph of Mr. Coffer by Robert Polidori.*

crises into a form of stylized theatre. Among the works on view is his last and possibly weirdest painting, in which the artist and his wife and daughter respond with calm horror to what seems to be a speaking pigeon. Through Sept. 28. (Center for Figurative Painting, 115 W. 30th St. 868-3452.)

GALLERIES-DOWNTOWN

LEON GOLUB
A consolation prize for borough-challenged viewers who missed the recent retrospective of this scrappy painter-cum-activist at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. In lieu of fifty years' worth of work, this concise show zeros in on just five, from 1994 to 1999. The work remains raw in both subject and form, with paintings rendered on unstretched linen and tacked to the wall like banners. Golub's trademark feral dogs and battered bodies are still in evidence, but the strident savagery of his earlier pictures—explicit protests against American involvement in Vietnam and Central America—is not. Mortality may have replaced brutality as the artist's muse. Through Sept. 15. (Cooper Union, E. 8th St. at Third Ave. 353-4155.)

"SCREEN"
The latest contender in the summer's spate of video group shows is entertaining, if erratic. A sketch pad serves as the screen for Ellen Harvey's projection, "I Am a Bad Camera," a real-time representation of the artist sketching a portrait of a friend who comments on the quality of the likeness. Two men in monkey masks and sneakers wrestle in a freewheeling tape by Alexander Roytburd; intended as a slapstick reënactment of the Balkan conflict, it resembles a low-fi, nudist "Planet of the Apes." On a more austere note, Zachary Shuman's black-and-white DVD, "Bifurcation," whose imagery shifts from the architectural to the biological, runs on a grid of security cameras like a sort of structuralist surveillance. Through Sept. 8. (Spencer Brownstone, 39 Wooster St. 334-3455.)

AUCTIONS & ANTIQUES

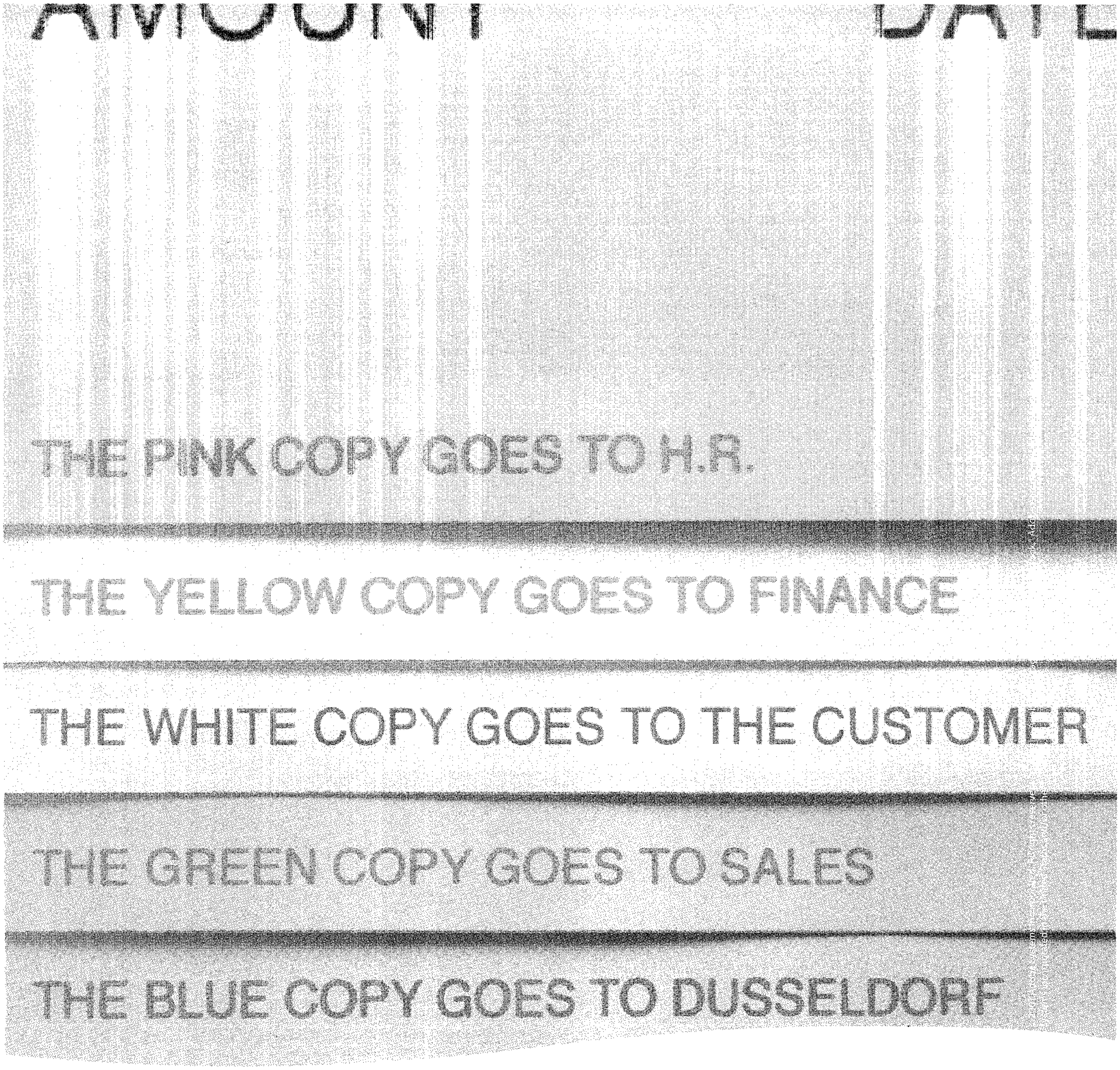
FRIENDS IN DEED
The fall auction season begins with a sale to benefit this charitable organization, which is dedicated to helping those with life-threatening illnesses. The hundred and twenty-five offerings include a photograph of Marilyn Monroe by Richard Avedon, Harrison Ford's bullwhip from "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom," art works by Jim Dine and Brice Marden, and sketches of original designs by Ralph Lauren and Manolo Blahnik. (Christie's, 20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. For information about tickets, which are required, call 539-2609. Sept. 10 at 6.)

DOYLE
Sept. 11 at 10 A.M.: A wide variety of fine jewelry (by such makers as Cartier and Van Cleef & Arpels), wristwatches and pocket watches, and objects of virtu. Among the notable items are a selection of diamonds and rubies from the estate of the socialite Dorothy Strelsin. (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

PHILIP-LORCA DI CORCIA
DiCorcia, best known for his slick, staged sidewalk scenes, has set them aside to produce "Heads," images of random pedestrians. He marked an "X" on the sidewalk under a Times Square scaffold, hid a tripod in plain sight, and stood by with remote controls for his camera and strobe light, photographing almost everyone who walked into focus. The artistic control sacrificed in that shooting process was reclaimed in editing—the final product is a carefully selected mix of archetypes. Among the urban figures anointed by his signature spotlight are a mailman, a pimpled teen-ager, a security guard, and an old woman hiding under a yellow rain bonnet. The pictures are, in essence, enlarged and more dramatic updates of Harry Callahan's long-lens closeups of Chicago pedestrians in 1950; diCorcia, the first postmodern street photographer, has gone modern. Opening Sept. 6. (PaceWildenstein Chelsea, 534 W. 25th St. 929-7000.)

ROLAND FISCHER
This Munich-based photographer, known for his pictures of French nuns, has recently been using digital technology to work with architectural photography. At up to nine feet tall, his prints of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inside-out cathedrals (with their façades superimposed over their interiors) are stunning, but the stunt grows tiresome before you can finish taking it in. More conventional-looking closeups of corporate high-rises manage to make their grids beautiful, scary, and even a little funny. Some may feel a pang of disappointment upon learning that Fischer, who takes the photos from street level, straightens out the converging lines in the studio. Of course, if worrying about such niceties of technique isn't passé now, it will be soon enough. Opening Sept. 6. (Von Lintel & Nusser, 555 W. 25th St. 242-0599.)

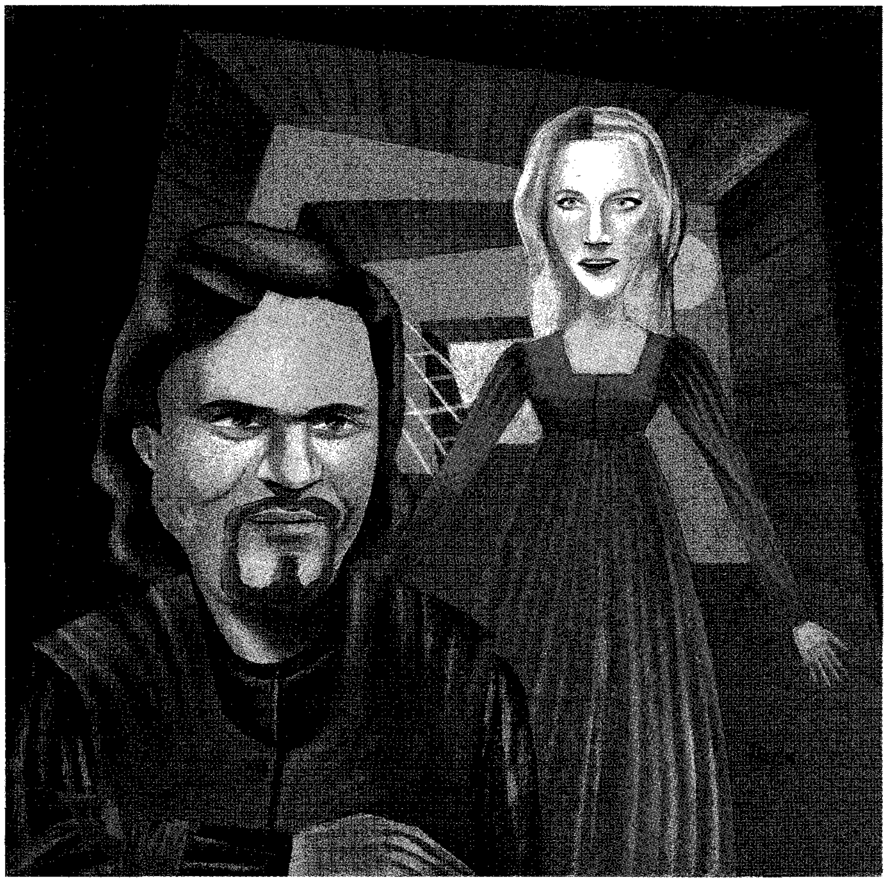
DAVID GOLDBLATT
Goldblatt, whose grandparents moved from Lithuania to South Africa in the eighteen-nineties, grew up outside Johannesburg. He describes his work as recording "the conditions of society rather than the climactic outcomes of those conditions." This Farm Security Administration style was ideal for the everyday discontent of apartheid. While Goldblatt does, in one case, show the aftermath of an encounter with the security police (matching casts on both of fifteen-year-old Lawrence Matjee's arms), the violence is just as present in an embossed metal armband identifying the "Boss Boy" of the Randfontein Estates Gold Mine and in the faces of black commuters buying tickets for enforced travel to relocated homes. Through Oct. 6. (AXA Gallery, 787 Seventh Ave., at 51st St. 554-4818.)

MIGUEL MORALES
The transparencies of divers underwater which cover the gallery's windows may be the first thing viewers notice, but most of Morales's photographs of young men jumping from Acapulco cliffs are reserved and reportorial. The best of them capture their subjects midair, arms outstretched in a surrender to gravity which recalls the Christian surrender to martyrdom. Through Sept. 21. (Mexican Cultural Institute, 27 E. 39th St. 217-6422.)

"ANCIENT SITES OF THE AMERICAS"
This group show, with work by Teoberto Maler (1842-1919), Désiré Charnay (1828-1915), and Alfred Percival Maudslay (1850-1931), brings together some of the first photographs ever made of ancient Mayan sites. Maler and Charnay visited Mexico with French forces protecting Emperor Maximilian in the eighteen-sixties, while Maudslay went to escape the cold of his native England and stayed to photograph for more than ten years. In their day, these would've been straight documents; now the patina on the prints competes with the antiquity of the subjects for historical interest. Through Sept. 19. (Throckmorton, 153 E. 61st St. 223-1059.)

"SHIFTING TIDES: CUBAN PHOTOGRAPHY AFTER THE REVOLUTION"
There's plenty of the expected here: Che and Fidel lurk around every corner, and elderly couples dance lustily in María Eugenia Haya's work from the nineteen-seventies. But, thankfully, it looks like vintage cars and dilapidated mansions are just tourist obsessions—local art photographers have other things on their minds. José A. Figueroa's black-and-white image of a tractor passing a cowboy on a dusty road is characteristic of the ironic social realism of the late sixties and early seventies. The next generation looks into private life, in Abigail González's squalid, intimate, below-the-waist bathroom scenes and Ernesto Leal's documentation of the dust under his bed. Does their work demonstrate the ease with which current trends in contemporary art slip through the embargo, or a Castro-influenced interest in surveillance? The photographers' difficult dance with propaganda and censorship allows only furtive social and political commentary; many of these pieces are as much high-concept puzzles as exotic postcards. Through Oct. 27. (Grey, 100 Washington Sq. E. 998-6780.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (860-1777)—Sebastião Salgado's **"Migrations: Humanity in Transition."** Over the past seven years, Salgado has visited more than thirty-five countries, travelling with and photographing some of the hundred million migrants now wandering the planet. Viewers who follow international news may be familiar not only with the trouble spots he's been to—Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia among them—but also with these images, some of which have appeared in major American news magazines. Nevertheless, the effect of seeing them, particularly the sweeping landscapes, as immaculate black-and-white prints filling these large, open galleries remains powerful. Through Sept. 9. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; and Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)


Mark Delavan and Susan B. Anthony are featured in the New York City Opera's first production of the season, "The Flying Dutchman," on September 11.

OLAF HAJEK

Short List

JOHN COFFER
The Viewing Room, 114 W. 17th St. 638-1920. Opening Sept. 7.

See the museum listings for a photography exhibition at the National Museum of the American Indian.

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
The robust American bass-baritone Mark Delavan, in his fifth opening-night performance for the company, takes the title role in Wagner's **"The Flying Dutchman,"** which is performed in the one-act Bayreuth version, without intermission; this new production is the N.Y.C.O.'s first staging of the work since 1977. The other singers include Carl Tanner and Kevin Langan, along with Susan B. Anthony (as Senta), Marion Capriotti, and Scott Piper, all of whom make their company débuts. Stephen Lawless (in another début) is the director; George Manahan conducts. (Sept. 11 at 7:30.) (New York State Theatre. 307-4100.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

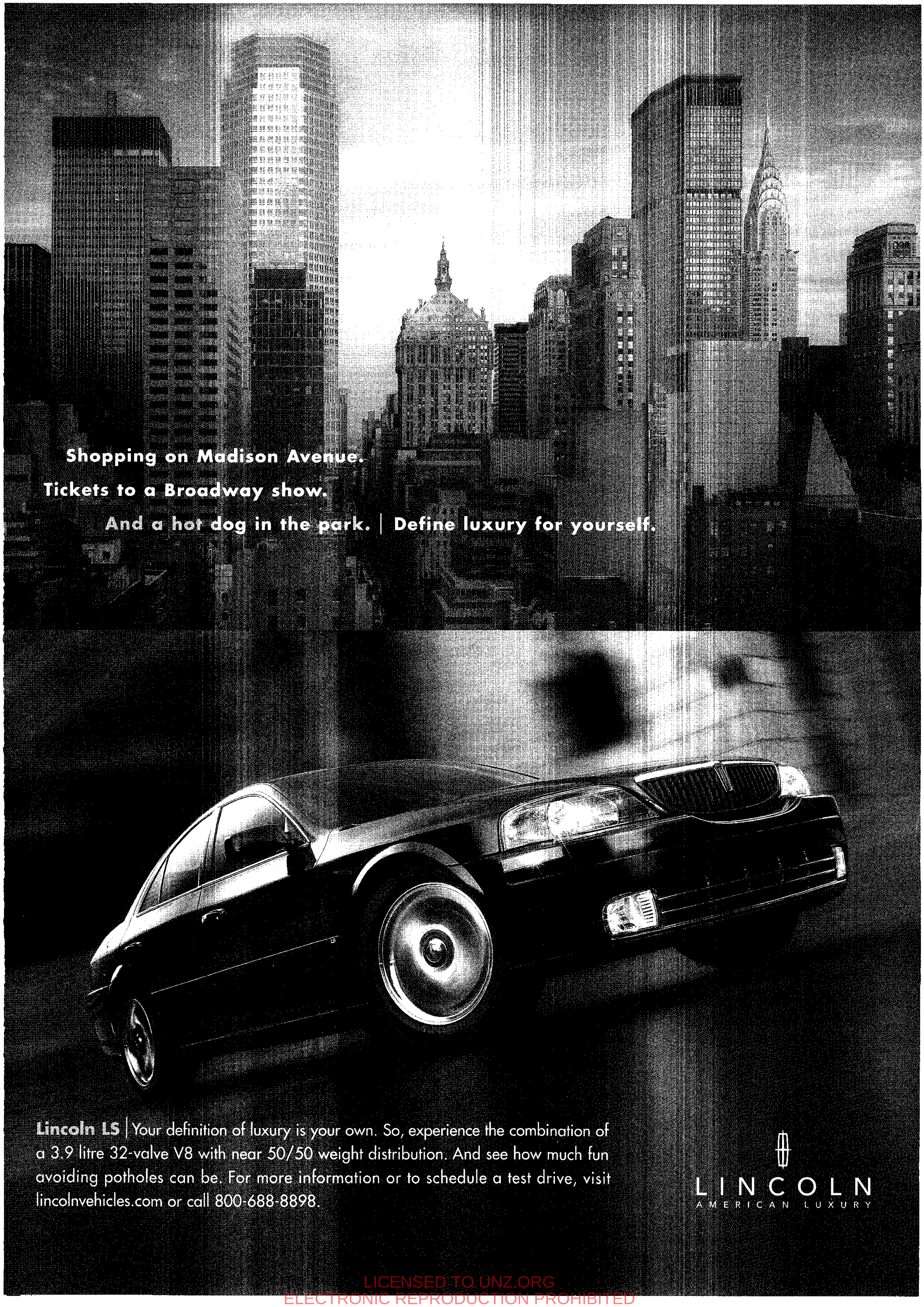
PRIME SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Haerang Hwang conducts the freelance ensemble in Mendelssohn's "Scottish" Symphony, Beethoven's "Emperor" Concerto (with the pianist Junie Cho), and a new work of his own. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Sept. 8 at 8:30.)

RECITALS

NEW YORK PHILOMUSICA
As part of Trinity's "Vive la France!" concert festival, four members of the ensemble—the clarinettist Alan Kay, the violinist Soovin Kim, the cellist Michel Kannen, and the pianist Meg Bachman Vas—present Messiaen's radiant "Quartet for the End of Time." (Trinity Church, Broadway at Wall St. Sept. 6 at 1. No tickets necessary.)

BARGEMUSIC
September finds most of New York's classical-music organizations rising from their summer slumbers, but Bargemusic just goes on doing what it does year-round, delivering expert performances of standard chamber repertory in one of the city's most alluring marine settings. Sept. 6-7 at 7:30: The cellist Ronald Thomas and the violinist Martin Beaver team up for Ravel's coruscating Duo for Violin and Cello and join the pianist Anne-Marie McDermott for Dvořák's Trio in F Minor, Op. 65. ♦ Sept. 8 at 7:30 and Sept. 9 at 4: All three musicians return, presenting the Handel-Halvorsen "Passacaglia" (an extravagantly Romantic set of variations on a Baroque theme, one of the nuggets of the violin-and-cello repertory) and piano trios by Beethoven (in E-Flat Major, Op. 70, No. 2) and Shostakovich. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

CARNEGIE HALL NEIGHBORHOOD CONCERT SERIES
This annual series of free concerts, given throughout the five boroughs, starts off with an eclectic program at the World Financial Center Plaza, hosted by the comedian Colin Quinn. The classical performers include the Imani Winds and the chamber choir Antioch, who are featured along with a range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across the country

of folk, jazz, and funk artists (including the Mingus Ensemble). (220 Vesey St. Sept. 8 from 2 to 6:30. No tickets necessary.)

THE HENRY STREET CONCERTS: "REMEMBERING DVOŘÁK IN NEW YORK"
Antonín Dvořák's music remains ubiquitous, and for good reason: every one of his spontaneous but exquisitely crafted scores, whether joyful or serious, simple or complex, overflows with his love of life. On the hundred and sixtieth anniversary of his birth, the Henry Street Chamber Players (with the Metropolitan Opera bass-baritone Terry Cook) pay their respects with a program that includes the Piano Quintet, the String Quintet with Double Bass, and two of the "Biblical Songs," which are among his most personal works, written during his American years. Also on the program are songs by Harry T. Burleigh, the most prominent of Dvořák's African-American pupils, and by the gifted Czech composer Hans Krása, a victim of the Nazi concentration camps. (Harry de Jur Playhouse, 466 Grand St. Sept. 8 at 7:30. No tickets necessary.)

SUNDAYS ON THE ISLAND
Ilan Rechtman, the pianist who founded this long-running City Island chamber-music series, and the cellist Wolfram Koessel, its current director, present a duo recital of music by Debussy, Brahms, and others. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., the Bronx. 914-664-6934. Sept. 9 at 12:30.)

ST. PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL ORGAN SERIES
Joseph J. Wozniak, the organist and music director at the Church of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament in Roseland, New Jersey, offers a free concert featuring works by two twentieth-century masters of sacred music, Healey Willan and Jehan Alain. (Fifth Ave. at 51st St. Sept. 9 at 4:45. No tickets necessary.)

JUILLIARD ARTISTS IN CONCERT
Music by Sibelius, Ravel, Debussy ("Syrinx"), Piazzolla ("Café 1930"), and others, presented by the flutist Ulla Suokko and the harpist Gulnara Mashurova. (180 Maiden Lane, at Front St. Sept. 11 at 12:30. No tickets necessary.)

CONCERTANTE CHAMBER PLAYERS
The young Juilliard-trained string ensemble (which includes the violinist Colin Jacobsen and the cellists Edward Arron and Alexis Pia Gerlach) enlivens a program of Boccherini and Brahms (the String Sextet No. 1 in B-Flat Major, a work full of youthful passion) with a piece by Martinů (the Sextet for Strings, H. 224). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Sept. 11 at 2.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

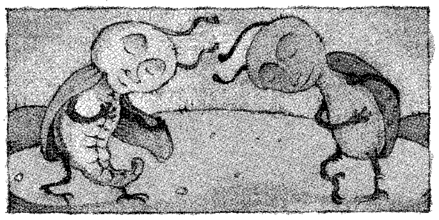
READINGS
Sept. 5 at 7:30: By friends of John Cage, from the composer's stories, lectures, and other writings. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Sept. 10 at 7: By Whitney Terrell, from his novel, "The Huntsman." (Half King, 505 W. 23rd St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Sept. 11 at 4: By the actor Jim Dale, the winner of a Grammy Award for the best recording of a children's book, his rendering of "Goblet of Fire," from "Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban." (Scholastic Store, 557 Broadway, between Prince and Spring Sts. For reservations, which are required, call 343-4903.)

TALKS
Sept. 6 at 5:30: Raymond Gastil, the executive director of the Van Alen Institute, and the architect Michael Manfredi moderate a discussion on new design along the New York City waterfront with a variety of architects who are currently involved in waterfront projects here in town. (New School, 66 W. 12th St. For reservations, which are required, call 924-7000, ext. 16.) ♦ Sept. 7 at 8: The performer and choreographer Eunjin Hwang offers a presentation on the history of Korean dance. (Graduate Center, City University of New York, Fifth Ave. at 34th St. 817-8215.) ♦ Sept. 10 at 6:30: Senator George J. Mitchell talks about the peace process in Northern Ireland. (Center for Religious Inquiry, St. Bartholomew's Church, Park Ave. at 51st St. No tickets necessary.)

BOOK CURRENTS

Apropos of Everything

C. Dallett Hemphill got the idea for her book **BOWING TO NECESSITIES: A HISTORY OF MANNERS IN AMERICA, 1620-1860** (Oxford) while reading the diary of a socially maladroit nineteenth-century ancestor, Isaac Mickle, who had read a manual to improve his awkward bows. Hemphill finds that for the early American élite, manners were a means of reinforcing precarious status. Jeremiah Shepherd, a minister in Colonial New England, never forgave a woman who failed to bow deeply enough to him, even though she was in bed with an "ague fit."

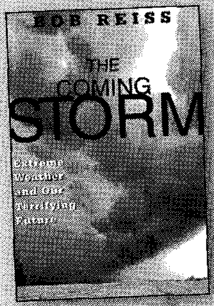


By the late nineteenth century, however, high-toned etiquette had become a preoccupation for many Americans. **THE LADIES' ETIQUETTE HANDBOOK** (Iowa) presents two texts from the eighteen-eighties in facsimile. The editor, David E. Schoonover, points out that although the ideals of dining had been intended for the haute bourgeoisie, the books were actually written for ordinary folk. One page mandates carrying a white dinner fan, but the next offers less ambitious advice: "Cut your food with a knife but convey it to your mouth with a fork."

Away from the home, Dutch sociologist Wilbert Van Vree's **MEETINGS, MANNERS AND CIVILIZATION** (Leicester), translated from the Dutch by Kathleen Bell, charts the development of meeting etiquette from primitive campfires to modern boardrooms. Meetings were especially important in Holland, where cities could only stay above sea level by organized community efforts. Holland's habit of meeting incessantly has persisted, and nowadays it exasperates negotiators from other countries. A Portuguese participant finds it "boringly dreadful," a German observes that "they only meet here for the sake of meeting," and an American exclaims, "For heaven's sake, let's stop talking about it and DO something!"

—*Leo Carey*

SERGIO RUZZIER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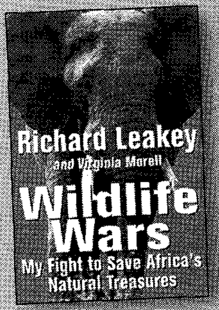
Richard Leakey
and Virginia Morell
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My Fight to Save Africa's Natural Treasures

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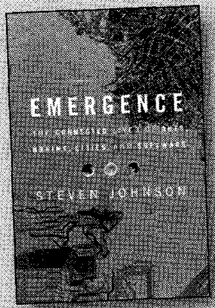
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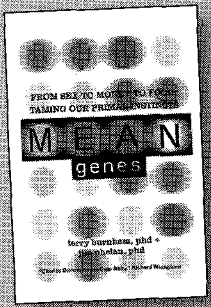
MEAN genes
terry burnham, phd + jay phelan, phd

WEAK LINKS

Though issues like body image, addiction, and relationships have long been analyzed in psychological terms, *Mean Genes* reveals that our struggles with them are in fact battles with our own genes. Examining these issues through an evolutionary lens, the authors offer steps to leading a more satisfying life.

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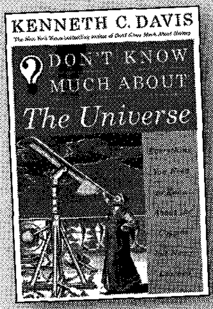
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MOVIES OPENING

BOUNCE: BEHIND THE VELVET ROPE
A documentary about night-club bouncers, featuring Lenny (The Guv'nor) McLean. Steven Cantor directed. Opening Sept. 7. (Angelika Film Center.)

DJOMEH
The writer-director Hassan Yektapanah received the Camera d'Or at Cannes for this story of an Afghani farmworker and refugee who falls in love with an Iranian girl. In Farsi. Opening Sept. 5. (Film Forum.)

THE IRON LADIES
A Thai comedy about a volleyball team, composed mostly of homosexuals and transvestites, which competes in the national championships. Opening Sept. 7. (Quad Cinema.)

L.I.E.
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Sept. 7.

A MATTER OF TASTE
Bernard Rapp wrote and directed this thriller, which begins when a young waiter gets hired to be a personal food taster for a wealthy executive. With Bernard Giraudeau and Jean-Pierre Lorit. In French. Opening Sept. 7.

THE MUSKETEER
A historical action picture based on "The Three Musketeers," in which D'Artagnan (Justin Chambers) seeks glory and revenge in France in the seventeenth century. With Catherine Deneuve, Tim Roth, and Mena Suvari. Peter Hyams directed. Opening Sept. 7.

OUR LADY OF THE ASSASSINS
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Sept. 7.

ROCK STAR
A comedic drama about the lead singer (Mark Wahlberg) of a heavy-metal tribute band who's recruited to join the real band. With Jennifer Aniston. Stephen Herek directed. Opening Sept. 7.

SOUL SURVIVORS
Casey Affleck, Melissa Sagemiller, Wes Bentley, and Eliza Dushku appear in this horror movie in which a girl sees apparitions of her dead boyfriend. Opening Sept. 7.

TWO CAN PLAY THAT GAME
Mark Brown wrote and directed this battle-of-the-sexes comedy. Vivica A. Fox and Morris Chestnut play the lead roles. Opening Sept. 7.

VENGO
A drama directed by Tony Gatlif about the blood feud between two Andalusian families, with a score featuring flamenco music. In Spanish. Opening Sept. 7. (The Screening Room.)

FILM NOTES

AMERICAN PIE 2
More humiliating sex adventures from America's favorite dumb-dumb teens. In this one, they allegedly take the next step into adulthood, but the material seems more infantile and antierotic than ever. It's amazing that actual teen-agers accept this picture of themselves and don't throw popcorn or something worse at the screen. With Jason Biggs, showing some comic style as the stumbling Jim, and Chris Klein, Seann William Scott, Mena Suvari, and Eugene Levy.—*David Denby* (Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Olympia I and II, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Union Square, and Waverly.)

APOCALYPSE NOW REDUX
Just when you thought it was safe to go back to the jungle . . . Francis Ford Coppola's steaming, misshapen epic, now twenty-two years old, is with us once more, and it feels madder and more necessary than ever: an all but unanswerable rebuke to the cinematic flimsiness of the interim. With the editorial support of Walter Murch, Coppola has revisited the scene of his movie and recut from the original dailies, adding, along the way, some forty-nine minutes of excised footage. This includes, you will be charmed to discover, more sex: a dinner party and postprandial seduction scene on a French plantation, and the dreamy, sorrowful coupling of soldiers and Playboy models in the cockpit of a grounded helicopter. Whether we need this stuff remains arguable, but it certainly thickens the surfeit of half-satisfied desires that were already boiling away inside the movie. For good measure, there is also our first sight of Brando in broad daylight, mocking the imprisoned Martin Sheen. The new print is ripe and lustrous, and the sound recording—of river whispers as much as of music—could have come straight from a hypnotist's handbook.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 8/6/01.) (Astor Plaza, BAM Rose Cinemas, Lincoln Square, 72nd Street East, and Union Square.)

BAND OF OUTSIDERS
The two heroes (Claude Brasseur and Sami Frey) begin by playacting crime-and-violence movies, then really act them out in their lives. Their girl (Anna Karina), wanting to be accepted, tells them there is money in the villa where she lives. And we watch, apprehensive and puzzled, as the three of them go through the robbery they're committing as if it were something in a movie—or a fairy tale. This 1964 Jean-Luc Godard film is like a reverie of a gangster movie as students in an espresso bar might remember it or plan it. It has the gangster-film virtues (loyalty, daring) but they are mixed with innocence, amorality, lack of equilibrium. It's as if a French poet took a banal American crime novel and told it to us in terms of the romance and beauty he read between the lines; Godard re-creates the gangsters and the moll with his world of associations—seeing them as people in a Paris café, mixing them with Rimbaud, Kafka, Alice in Wonderland. In French.—*Pauline Kael* (Film Forum.)

BUBBLE BOY
Not exactly a comedy and not exactly funny, this picture is a weird Disney misfire. It's a classic American tale that involves making fun of Republicans, midgets, decapitated cows, Jews, Hindus, and Christians. Jake Gyllenhaal plays Jimmy, a boy born without immunities who travels, encased in a bubble, to Niagara Falls where his childhood sweetheart (Marley Shelton) is about to marry a sideburned loser. There are a few clever comic touches, such as the way actors keep checking their reflections in Jimmy's bubble, but mostly the film is of interest as a pop-culture accident. The pièce de résistance is Bright and Shiny, a freaky cult of brainwashed yuppies (their leader is the golden-tressed Fabio) who have a disturbingly catchy theme song.—*Michael Agger* (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.)

COLLEGE
A beautiful little comedy. Buster Keaton is a bookworm, working his way through college and determined to become a star athlete. The story line isn't as miraculously fresh as in a couple of his films, but it allows for some of his most startlingly inventive stunts. Despite the many pilferings from this 1927 film (it has been a gold mine for other comedians), the routines are executed so precisely and with such an air of confident innocence that they are charged with surprise—and probably will be forever. Silent.—*P.K.* (Film Forum; Sept. 10.)

THE CURSE OF THE JADE SCORPION
Woody Allen's latest comedy, set in an auburn-colored and jazz-haunted past, looks good, but the picture feels attenuated, redundant, and trivial. Allen plays a garrulous nineteen-forties insurance investigator and Helen Hunt is the newly hired office-efficiency expert. They meet, hate each other, and engage in baroquely phrased period insults that allegedly hide their true attraction. The plot turns on the manipulations of a mesmerist (David Ogden Stiers) who intones magical words into the telephone, causing people to fall into trances and commit crimes. This may be funny when seen once, but it's hardly worth the attention Allen gives it. Woody himself is looking a little worn, and his flirting, however acidly, with an actress nearly thirty years younger than himself becomes embarrassing. You have to enjoy the movie (if you can) as a put-on, not as the romantic comedy it's intended to be. With Charlize Theron as a rich nymphomaniac.—*D.D.* (BAM Rose Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, and Village East Cinemas.)

THE DEEP END
A heartfelt and beautifully made neo-noir thriller that takes its moods and colors from the turquoise blue of Lake Tahoe. A mother of three, Margaret (Tilda Swinton), discovers a dead body outside her family's lakeside home one morning. It is her teenage son's gay lover, a Reno club owner and lowlife, and Margaret sets about disposing of the corpse as if it were a particularly cumbersome household nuisance. The movie, which is beautifully shot by Giles Nuttgens, develops rhapsodic and fatalistic moods that hold you even when the story becomes improbable. With Jonathan Tucker as the son with whom Margaret has a largely silent bond, and Goran Visnjic as a sad-eyed, melancholy blackmailer whom she perversely finds attractive. Written and directed by the team of Scott McGehee and David Siegel.—*D.D.* (8/13/01) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, Empire 25, Lincoln Square, and Park & 86th Street Cinemas.)

ENJO
A mournful Japanese masterpiece from 1958, based on Yukio Mishima's "The Temple of the Golden Pavilion." The director, Kon Ichikawa, portrays the jagged mental topography of a stuttering student who sets fire to a Buddhist shrine. We see this pavilion as he does, an oasis of unsullied beauty, but we also see how burning it to save it from corruption would be an act of lunacy. The movie is a nightmare of wounded adolescence: the antihero has no bank of emotions to draw on when faced with the infidelity of his mother, the death of his beloved father, and the petty corruptions that are rife even on temple grounds. Ichikawa splashes the sombre tale with knowing satire and erotic humor, especially with the characters of a hypocritical priest and a clubfooted, manipulative student; they are wonderfully played by Ganjiro Nakamura and Tatsuya Nakadai, respectively. But at the center is Raizô Ichikawa, who is heartbreaking as he goes from tabula rasa to wretched soul. In Japanese.—*Michael Sragow* (Museum of Modern Art; Sept. 8 and Sept. 11.)

FIGHTER
A fascinating documentary directed by Amir Bar-Lev about two elderly but vigorous Czech Jews, émigrés to America, who survived the Nazi occupation and the Stalinist secret police and returned to Europe, where their friendship, amazingly, fell apart. Jan Wiener, a university instructor, is an authentic hero of the Second World War; Arnošt Lustig, a writer, wit, and bon vivant, has long admired Wiener, but he is also, perhaps, jealous of Wiener's bravery and extraordinary good looks. As they retrace the route of Wiener's escape from occupied Czechoslovakia, they begin to argue about the meaning of Wiener's experience, which Lustig insists on seeing as far more complex and many-sided than the iron-willed Wiener is willing to admit. The movie is, by turns, a European travelogue, an interrogation of memory, and a Shakespearean comedy of temperament.—*D.D.* (9/3/01) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

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GHOST WORLD
Two strip-mall Savonarolas, Enid (Thora Birch) and Rebecca (Scarlett Johansson), gaze with disgust at the fallen world around them. Terry Zwigoff's movie is based on Daniel Clowes's cartoon novel, which he and Clowes adapted. For a while, "Ghost World" seems to be a new type of dyspeptic comedy, acid yet tender. Zwigoff's sense of visual elegance gives clarity and snap to material that might have fallen into a crabby nowheresville. But the movie loses its cool. It zeros in on Enid's unhappiness, and she begins to seem like a typical teen-ager, one who makes jokes to cover her pain and who needs to grow up. See it for Birch's hostile stare and Johansson's devastating monotone.—*D.D.* (8/6/01) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

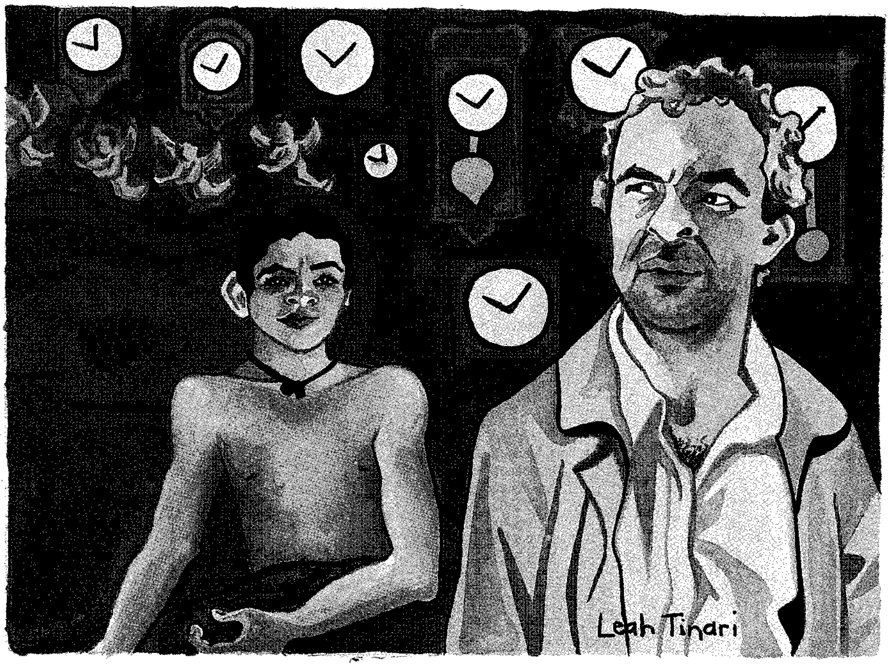
HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH
Trash perfection. Flamboyant costumes, lollipop colors, and glam-rock music come together explosively in John Cameron Mitchell's movie adaptation of his Off Broadway hit. Hedwig, a transsexual rocker, tours the dives of America in pursuit of her gorgeous, successful former protégé (Michael Pitt). Her band is called the Angry Inch (which also refers to the result of a botched sex-change operation), and her story unwinds in a series of monologues and rocking stage performances. Mitchell's confident, nonpandering direction brings out cheeky performances from his actors, and songwriter Stephen Trask's tunes, worthy of Bowie at his gender-bending best, wrap the film in loving, outré fashion.—*Bruce Diones* (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 3rd Avenue, Empire 25, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

HOME OF THE BRAVE
This genuinely cathartic 1949 melodrama is too little seen today; it's about a black soldier being treated for his paralyzing traumatic reaction to the combat death of a white friend. The movie grapples with racial issues and sometimes fumbles them, especially when it accuses the protagonist of being oversensitive to slurs; in Arthur Laurents' original play, the hero was Jewish. But the movie also transcends them. It hinges on the character's realization that any man confronted with the death of a comrade-in-arms feels glad that he, himself, is alive. James Edwards gives a persuasive and beautiful performance of someone coming to terms with survivor's guilt. Mark Robson directed Carl Foreman's adaptation of the play with an intensity that strengthens its essential humanism.—*M.S.* (American Museum of the Moving Image; Sept. 8.)

JAY AND SILENT BOB STRIKE BACK
Kevin Smith ("Clerks," "Chasing Amy") sums up his career thus far in a ragtag affair that's profane, silly, and likable. Jay (Jason Mewes) and Silent Bob (Smith himself), the two stunningly unemployable young men who made peripheral appearances in earlier Smith movies, leave their turf outside a Quick Stop convenience store in Leonardo, New Jersey, and head for Hollywood. Jay, who looks like a stoned Viking, is a ranter—obscene, empty-brained, sublimely confident with women yet scoreless as a eunuch. Silent Bob, his patsy and fool, plays off Jay's tirades with yearning eyes. The movie is filled with antic references to the early Smith canon and much in-joking about the movie business. When the boys arrive in Los Angeles, they run into current and former stars of the independent cinema, including Matt Damon and Ben Affleck, who take turns dumping on one another's careers. With Chris Rock, Jason Biggs, Mark Hamill, and many others in cameo appearances.—*D.D.* (Battery Park 16, Cinema II, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

LISA PICARD IS FAMOUS
Two unemployed actors came up with the canny idea of starring in a mock documentary about two unemployed actors starring in a documentary about their search for success. The actors, Laura Kirk and Nat DeWolf, also wrote the script, and the film's director, Griffin Dunne, plays a director in the film. Instead of another insider diatribe about the players and poseurs of Hollywood, we are given the other side: a deftly shaped sendup of insecurity and ambition. Even so, the filmmakers are smart enough and connected enough—Mira Sorvino produced—to sprinkle their tale of wanna-bes with real-life celebrities (Sandra Bullock and Spike Lee, among others) doling out tongue-in-cheek career advice. Although Kirk and DeWolf's satirical script occasionally misfires, their film has a biting charm.—*B.D.* (Film Forum.)

O
This transposition of "Othello" to a Southern prep school, with Mekhi Phifer as a black star basketball player, Julia Stiles as his white girlfriend, and Josh Hartnett as a jealous white rival on the team, was held from distribution for two years, following the shootings at Columbine, but there was probably no need for caution, since the movie is sincere, nonexploitative, and heartfelt, and has no resemblance to any of the school shootings. Phifer's performance develops some tragic power, but Hartnett's Iago figure, without the benefit of verse—or Verdi's music—seems merely improbable. The movie is a decent try, but the attempts to stay close to Shakespeare's plot and to say something about American racism make for a complicated and confused way of telling a story that should have been straightforward. Directed by Tim Blake Nelson, sensitively, but without sensuality or excitement.—*D.D.* (BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, East 85th Street, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, 72nd Street East, and Village Theatre VII.)



Anderson Ballesteros and Germán Jaramillo in "Our Lady of the Assassins."

LEAH TINARI

THE OTHERS
Nicole Kidman, with a hairdo that makes her look like a red-headed Grace Kelly, plays an upper-class Englishwoman living in a big house on Jersey at the end of the Second World War. Her husband is off fighting, and her two small children are so sensitive to light that the curtains must always be drawn and anyone passing from room to room must shut one door before opening the next. The electricity is out, and the house is covered in fog. One rather misses a beast howling on the moors or a madwoman in the attic, but there are voices, many voices, and the servants make creepy remarks. The Spanish director Alejandro Amenábar works by suggestion much of the time: he favors ambiguity rather than outright horrors, and the sepulchral gray light of the house and grounds can be elegant. But the movie becomes monotonous; it's like a sluggish computer game in which movement is limited to one room at a time.—*D.D.* (8/13/01) (Battery Park 16, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, and Village Theatre VII.)

RAT RACE
The director Jerry Zucker, of "Airplane!" fame, gathers together a group of comic actors, including Whoopi Goldberg, Jon Lovitz, and John Cleese, for this sporadically zany comedy about a cross-country race for two million dollars. Some of Zucker's elaborate stunts are inspired, and the sight gags have the pleasing obviousness of his earlier work. The jokes tend to hang around waiting for a laugh, but the film builds enough momentum for a proper goofball finish.—*B.D.* (Battery Park 16, Coronet Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

RUSH HOUR 2
Like many other sequels to hit films, this replay of Chris Tucker and Jackie Chan's earlier smash does little to improve on the winning original formula. A murky plot—Tucker and Chan play mismatched cops out to break up a counterfeiting ring—lets the director Brett Ratner put the stars through the requisite verbal high jinks and stunts that recall the original.—*B.D.* (Battery Park 16, Chelsea West, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, Sutton 1 and 2, Union Square, and Waverly.)

TOGETHER
Lukas Moodysson's exemplary comedy, one part distressing to two parts delectable, is set in a hippie commune in the mid-nineteen-seventies—in Sweden, no less, where the hippie ethic was an article of faith. Within minutes, we know not only where we are but whom we are dealing with; as a director, Moodysson is the perfect host, calmly introducing us, without the trace of a sneer, to a broad selection of trolls and fruitcakes. What follows is a dance of desire, as men, women, and even children pair off with one another; under it all, like a bass note, sounds the story of Elisabeth (Lisa Lindgren) and her drunken husband, Rolf (Michael Nyqvist), strangers to this utopian colony, who finally find refuge, and a kind of reconciliation, in its absurd dreams. That is Moodysson's great trick: to blow hot and cold, allowing us both to laugh at these bearded types and to respect, even envy, their frazzled companionship. With the excellent Emma Samuelsson as the warring couple's daughter, and with the help of Abba—what did you expect?—on the soundtrack. In Swedish.—*A.L.* (8/20 & 27/01) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

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WHERE THE SIDEWALK ENDS
Ben Hecht wrote and Otto Preminger directed this trim 1950 film noir—one of those ninety-five-minute wonders that whisk an audience through a couple of twisty homicides and leave a whiff of melancholy in their wake. A violent New York City cop (Dana Andrews) wants to clear an innocent suspect of murder, but accidentally kills him. Then he falls in love with the suspect's widow (Gene Tierney). The way Andrews mingles sadism and sadness gives the movie pungency; Tierney is a tender woman of destiny, and Gary Merrill and Karl Malden head a gritty supporting cast.—*M.S.* (Film Forum; Sept. 7-8.)

ALSO PLAYING

CAPTAIN CORELLI'S MANDOLIN
Battery Park 16, Beekman, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, and Village Theatre VII.
JOHN CARPENTER'S GHOSTS OF MARS
Battery Park 16, Chelsea West, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Union Square.
LEGALLY BLONDE (7/16/01)
Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.
LUMUMBA
The Screening Room.
PLANET OF THE APES (8/6/01)
Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.
SEXY BEAST (6/18 & 25/01)
Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.
WET HOT AMERICAN SUMMER
Empire 25 and Village East Cinemas.

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LARA TOMLIN

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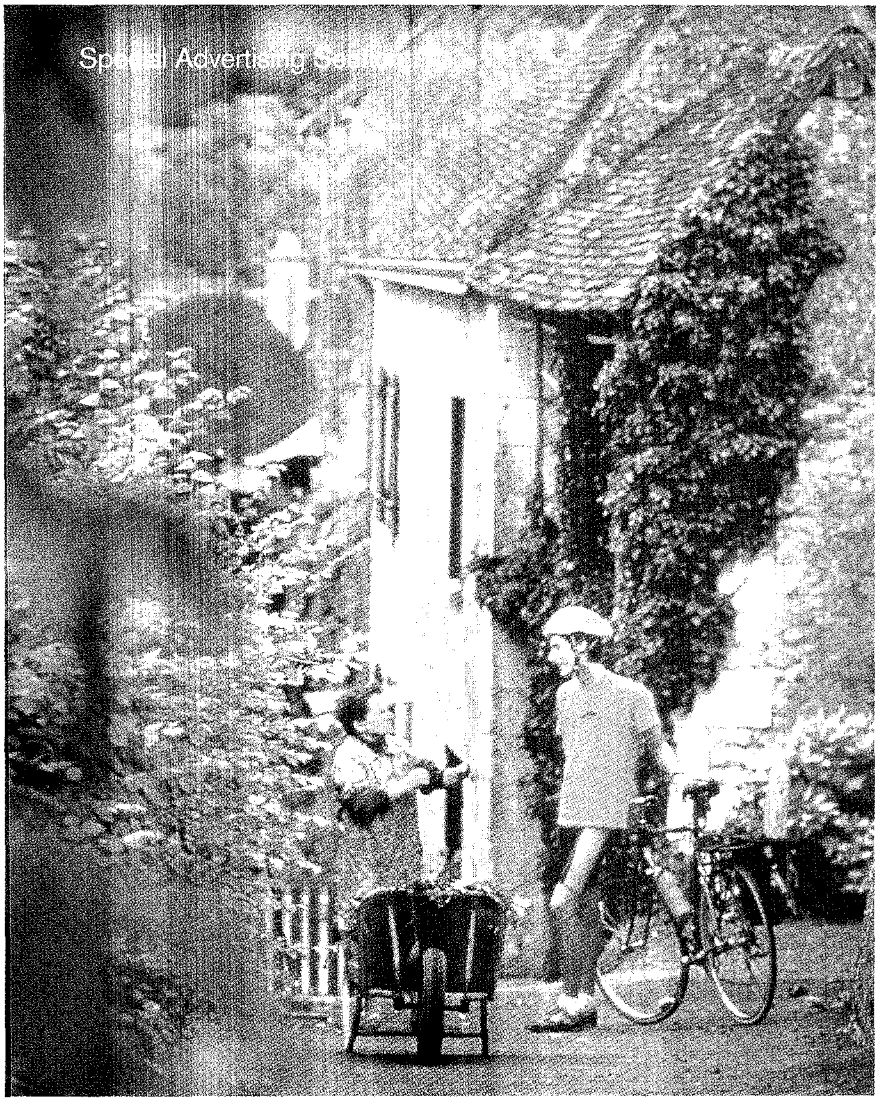
Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St. (945-3418).
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600).
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Sept. 9: "Hollywood on the Home Front: American Film in the 1940's." ♦ Sept. 8 at 2: "Home of the Brave" (†). ♦ Sept. 8 at 4: "Pinky" (1949, Elia Kazan). ♦ Sept. 9 at 2: "Pitfall" (1948, Andre De Toth). ♦ Sept. 9 at 4: "The Reckless Moment" (1949, Max Ophuls). ♦ Repertory night. Sept. 8-9 at 6:30: "The Edge of the World" (1937, Michael Powell).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (777-3456)—Sept. 5 at 4:30 and 9:30: "Blue Hill Avenue" (2001, Craig Ross, Jr.). ♦ A retrospective of films featuring the Italian comic Totò. All films are in Italian. Sept. 6 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Big Deal on Madonna Street" (1958, Mario Monicelli). ♦ Sept. 10 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "San Giovanni Takes Off" (1940, Amleto Palermi). ♦ Sept. 11 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Totò Con Man" (1961, Camillo Mastrocinque). ♦ Selections from the Latino film festival. Sept. 7 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Living the Life" (2000, Alex Muñoz). ♦ Sept. 8 at 2: "Ballad of a Soldier" (2000, Kinan Valdez). ♦ Sept. 8 at 4: "90 Miles" (2000, Juan Carlos Zaldivar). ♦ Sept. 8 at 7:30: "Off the Hook" (2000, Adam Watstein). ♦ Sept. 9 at 3: "Take It from Me" (2000, Emily Abt). ♦ Sept. 9 at 6: "Animals" (2000, Sergop Bizzio). ♦ Sept. 9 at 8: "The Blue Diner" (2001, Jan Egleson).
FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Through Oct. 4: "N.Y.P.D.," an eight-week festival of New York City crime movies. Sept. 5 at 2:15, 6, and 9:45: "Johnny O'Clock" (1947, Robert Rossen). ♦ Sept. 5 at 4 and 7:45: "Johnny Eager" (1941, Mervyn LeRoy). ♦ Sept. 6 at 2:55, 6, and 9:05: "Beast of the City" (1932, Charles Brabin). ♦ Sept. 6 at 1:25, 4:30, and 7:35: "While the City Sleeps" (1928, Jack Conway). ♦ Sept. 7-8 at 1:40, 5, and 8:20: "On Dangerous Ground" (1951, Nicholas Ray). ♦ Sept. 7-8 at 3:15, 6:35, and 9:55: "Where the Sidewalk Ends" (†). ♦ Sept. 9 at 1, 6, and 10: "Someone to Watch Over Me" (1987, Ridley Scott). ♦ Sept. 9 at 3:55 and 7:55: "Night Falls on Manhattan" (1997, Sidney Lumet). ♦ Sept. 11 at 2, 5:50, and 9:40: "Cruising" (1980, William Friedkin). ♦ Sept. 11 at 4 and 7:50: "Bad Lieutenant" (1992, Abel Ferrara). ♦ Mondays through Oct. 1: Buster Keaton classics. Sept. 10 at 2, 4:40, 7:20, and 10: "College" (†). The 7:20 show features live piano accompaniment. ♦ Sept. 10 at 3:20, 6, and 8:40: "The Electric House" (1922), "The Frozen North" (1922), and "Back Stage" (1919).
FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Through Oct. 30: "French Classics in Black & White." Sept. 11 at 12:20, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Beauty and the Beast" (1946, Jean Cocteau; in French).
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—James Bond films. Sept. 6 at 2:30 "From Russia with Love" (1963, Terence Young). ♦ Sept. 6 at 6 and Sept. 7 at 2:30: "Tomorrow Never Dies" (1997, Roger Spottiswoode). ♦ Through Oct. 2: A Kon Ichikawa retrospective. All films are in Japanese. Sept. 7 at 6 and Sept. 10 at 2:30: "An Actor's Revenge" (1963). ♦ Sept. 7 at 8:15 and Sept. 8 at 5: "Odd Obsession/The Key" (1959). ♦ Sept. 8 at 1 and Sept. 10 at 6: "Nihonbashi, Bridge of Japan" (1956). ♦ Sept. 8 at 3:15 and Sept. 11 at 2:30: "Enjo" (†). ♦ Sept. 9 at 1: "Mr. Pu" (1953). ♦ Sept. 9 at 3: "A Billionaire" (1954). ♦ Sept. 9 at 5: "A Full-Up Train" (1957). ♦ Sept. 11 at 6: "Dora-Heita" (2000).
THE MUSEUM OF TELEVISION & RADIO
25 W. 52nd St. (621-6800)—Through Sept. 16: "Hello, Goodbye," screenings of classic television shows. Sept. 5-9 at 3: The première and final episodes of "Family Ties" and "The Wonder Years." ♦ Sept. 6 at 6 and Sept. 7 at 7: The pilot episodes for "The Twilight Zone" and "Star Trek."
WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Sept. 6-9: "The Next Generation of Film." Events include an evening with the director Wes Anderson on Sept. 7 at 7:30 and a behind-the-scenes look at "The Lord of the Rings" on Sept. 9 at 7:30. For a complete schedule, visit http://www.filmlinc.com. ♦ Through Sept. 23: A series of Iranian films, featuring the work of the director Amir Naderi. All films are in Farsi. Sept. 10 at 1 and 8:15 and Sept. 11 at 3: "Harmonica" (1974). ♦ Sept. 10 at 3:30: "Tangsir" (1973). ♦ Sept. 10 at 6: "The Runner" (1985). ♦ Sept. 11 at 1: "Deadlock" (1973).



© Dan Klinglesmith

Ooh La La Loire

BICYCLE INTERLUDE NON PAREIL Balzac called the Loire "a valley which seems to turn gold…with the Indre unrolling in serpentine windings."

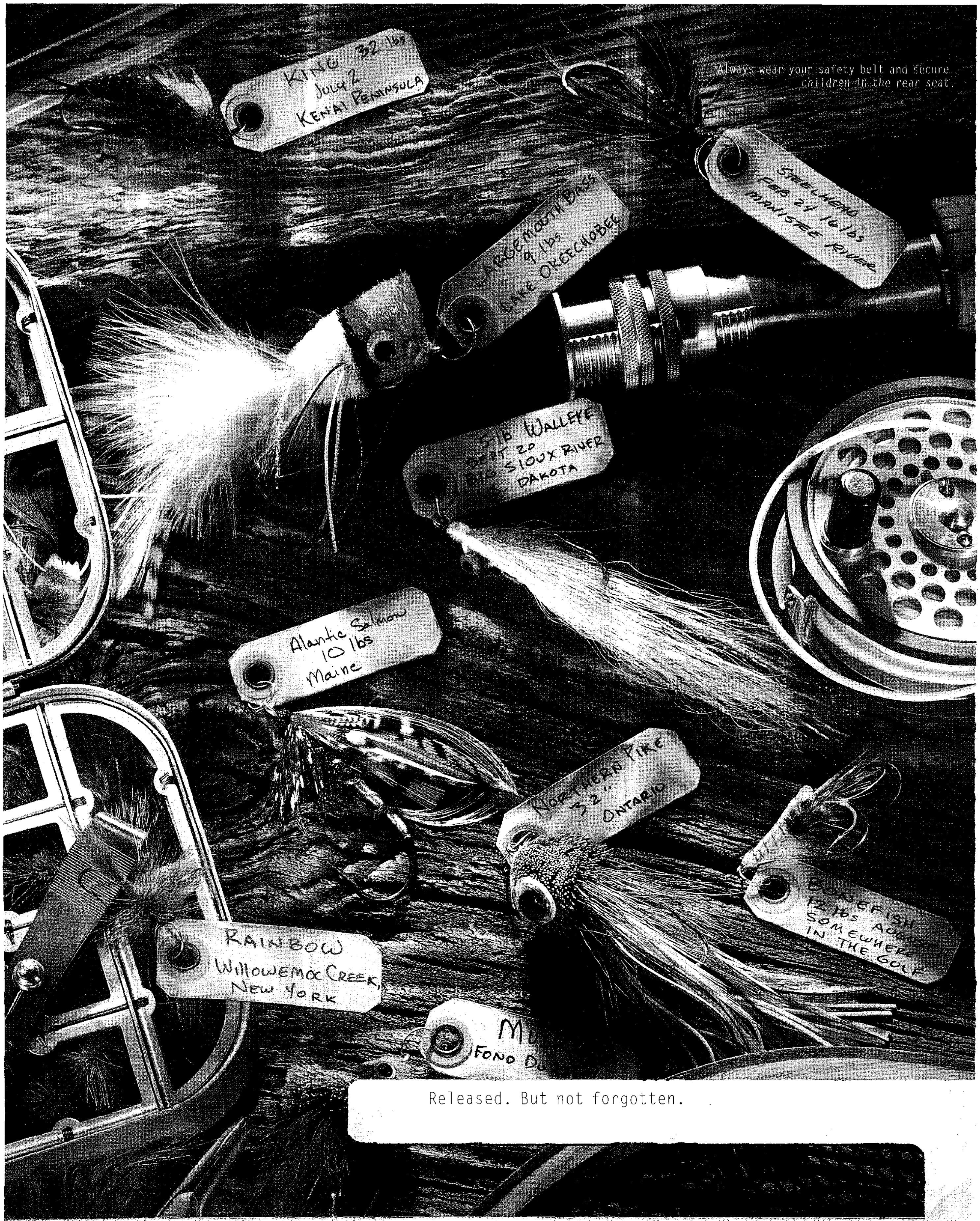
On my bicycle jaunt through the Loire Valley last autumn, I spied an elderly, denim-clad Frenchman kneeling in a green-striped field of *haricot vert* that sloped towards the river. I was soon chatting with him (thanks to my twice-a-week French lessons all summer) while his wife looked on amiably from the blue-trimmed doorway of their stone cottage. Happily, I snapped some pictures and cycled away, pursued by the hearty aroma of garlic and simmering mutton.

Memories such as these are one reason I like biking vacations, and for the recreational rider, the winding Loire Valley is a particularly desirable destination. Stretching west from Tours through the heart of France, the Loire region abounds with culture, yet yields a gentle landscape. And, preferring gilt to guilt, I delighted in the typical sort of luxurious Loire Valley accommodations that would have made my frugal Irish grandmother gasp.

Commercial bicycle-tour operators have been around for a few decades, but the opportunity to travel on two wheels without forsaking domestic comfort is a fairly recent development. Groups tend to be small, usually less than twenty-five, so you get plenty of personal attention from the knowledgeable tour guides. I particularly like Backroads' tours because their routes stick to country lanes (hence the company moniker). Although there's an organized itinerary, you may ignore it completely if you choose. "It's *your* vacation," one of the guides liked to remind me. Indeed, flexibility is the main appeal for most bikers. You may stop and sample from every vineyard you pass or pedal like an aspiring Lance Armstrong all day long. You can decide to have lunch on your own or join the group for a picnic of regional specialties prepared by the jovial, entertaining guides. One of the leaders ("the sweep rider") cycles along with the group while the other drives a van called the "sag-wagon." If you're bushed, you hail the sag-wagon and both you and your bike are promptly whisked off to the hotel.

In the Loire Valley, many hotels are converted châteaux, and I was ecstatic when we pulled into Château d'Artigny in Montbazon on the first day. While its grandiose design recalls the opulence of eighteenth-century France, it was built in the early twentieth century by the legendary *parfumeur* and publisher, François Coty. (The original château on this site was built during the Hundred Years War.) Over the years, the château consumed much of Coty's fortune, and Artigny remains a testament to his extravagant vision. From my room, paneled in bird-and-flower-splashed chintz, I looked down upon the front garden with its koi-filled fountain. The grand drawing and dining rooms were designed for Coty's lavish entertaining, and the rotunda features a dramatically lit trompe l'oeil of Coty and his wife decked out as court jesters. As if that weren't intoxicating enough, there are also cellars with more than twenty thousand bottles of wine, mostly from the Loire region.

Our leaders, Kiara O'Neil and Autumn Westbrook, hosted a reception at the rotunda. As we introduced ourselves—doctors, lawyers, business professionals, software engineers, retirees, and an architect (yours truly)—we shared our reasons for joining the tour. A woman from New York succinctly summarized our sentiments when she volunteered, "I heard that the rides were flat and the food was good." Afterwards, in the mirror-paneled dining room, the waiters brought chilled sorrel soup with a soupçon of cream cheese tinctured with smoked salmon. The wonderful French feast that followed ended with Valençay goat cheese, rhubarb ice cream, and a macaroon.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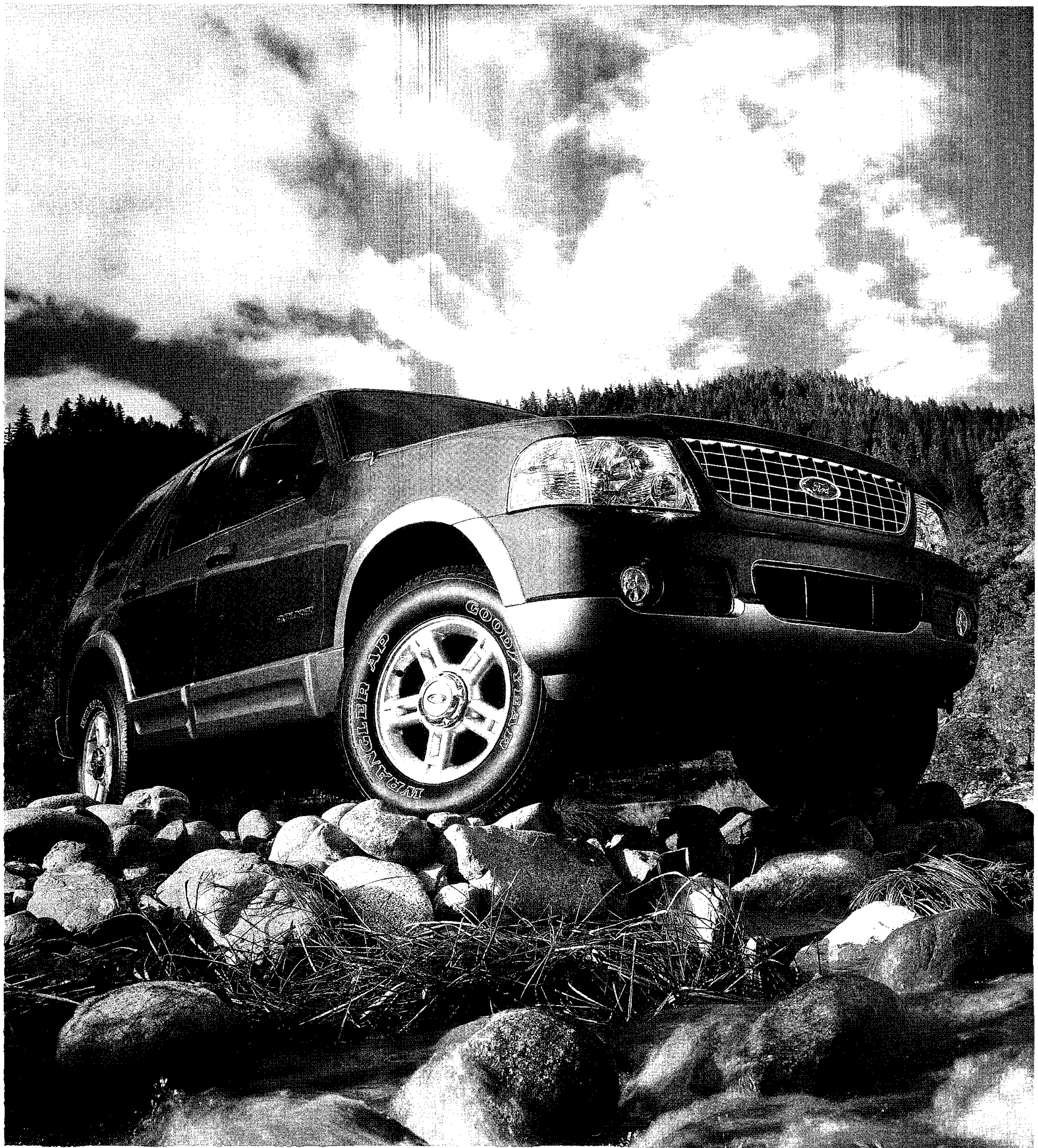

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The next morning, after buckling on our helmets (Backroads' one rigid rule: you must wear a helmet while riding), we proceeded down through the Chinon forest surrounding Artigny and onto a road alongside the Indre river. Soon we came upon a broad expanse of field bursting with large, drooping sunflowers. After more than twenty kilometers (which seemed to flash by faster than its twelve-mile equivalent would have), we approached our destination, Château de Villandry.

Villandry was built in 1532 on the site of an ancient fortress by Jean le Breton, finance minister to François I. Previously an ambassador to Italy, Le Breton spent his leisure hours studying what was then a new art form, the Italian Renaissance garden.

If you were watching a PBS special on Villandry, the camera would likely pan across the château's welcoming courtyard, move up the carved stone stairway, make a turn into a paneled salon, and, catching a hint of greenery, dolly over to one of the tall windows. The camera would then pause, framing for viewers the finest gardens in the Loire. In a far corner, a maze of paths would be glimpsed, and on the left, a lake in the shape of a Louis XV mirror. (A nod of thanks to the French nobility for draining France's marshes to make lakes.) To the right sits a *jardin potager* (kitchen garden), divided into nine equal squares, and planted with vegetables, fruit trees, and flowers for ornamentation. Four boxwood squares are trimmed into complex geometries—"knots" they are called—representing the four aspects of love: passion, tenderness, adultery, and tragedy. The adultery hedge is a metaphoric maze of flirtatious fans, cuckold horns, and deceitful letters.

Parc
pour
bicyclettes
obligatoire

PARFUMEUR COTY'S BAROQUE VISION Located in Tours, Château d'Artigny is one of the esteemed Small Luxury Hotels of the World. Although built in the early twentieth century, it recalls the opulence of the eighteenth century.

Thoroughly enchanted by the gardens, I am the last member of our group to leave the site. Autumn, the sweep rider, paces me as we ride through a linden forest and across open fields to the village of Saché, where in 1953 sculptor Alexander Calder traded three mobiles for a run down, seventeenth-century stone house and wagon shed. Now his 1974 piece, "Totem," stands in the town square. Today's midday meal, arranged by Kiara, is a lakeside picnic of goose and duck paté, broccoli quiche, a brie-like Selles-sur-Cher, and an apricot tart.

A short spin takes us on to the Château de Saché. This small, three-story castle, a real rambler that dates from the sixteenth century (but was substantially altered in the early nineteenth century) was the home of Jean de Margonne, the lover of Honoré de Balzac's mother. Margonne admired Balzac's talent, and, between 1829-48, the writer stayed at his château for long stretches (perhaps as much to escape his creditors as to write novels). In the Musée Balzac, we pace through various rooms behind our guide to see a collection of portraits, busts, and caricatures of the writer, including a sketch by Rodin. Finally, we are ushered into Balzac's famous bedroom. Here, the author customarily rose at 10 P.M., drank coffee, and drafted prose from his tapestry-upholstered chair until 6 P.M. the following evening—a twenty-hour writing marathon that puts the legendary bouts of Tennessee Williams to shame. Balzac's coffee pot was nearly as rotund as he, and may have precipitated his indefatigable schedule.

It seems to rain in the Loire Valley dependably three days out of every ten. Kiara and Autumn try to put the best face on the situation, suiting themselves up while at the same time offering alternative options. We can either ride, if we like, or be shuttled to any nearby location. I wisely packed rainwear, and now, early on day three, I'm glad to have it. The torrent breaks long enough to tempt me out onto the road, but soon it's pouring again. And it's hilly today, although the rain-drenched scenery is inviting—rolling fields, stone-walled vineyards, and Brothers Grimm-style forests.

Balzac opined that the Château Azay-le-Rideau (c.1518) on the Indre River was the Loire's "multifaceted

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diamond with the Indre as its setting." So true, I think, as I gaze upon its symmetrical stony whiteness mirrored in the moat. Steep facades of horizontal stonework are broken by window bays and pilasters in near musical rhythms. The château is also renowned for the portraits carved in panels above its stairways. More interesting to me are its fragile turrets, which seem more like a confectioner's wedding creation than castle strongholds.

HAVE LANGUAGE WILL TRAVEL

If you're headed to the Loire Valley and want to brush up on your French without subjecting yourself to a dreary textbook, Champs-Elysees suggests an alternative route to fluency. Its monthly audiomagazine (available on cassette and CD) is produced in an NPR-like format and supplemented by a print periodical rich in vocabulary and grammar (www.champs-elysees.com).

(from left to right) © Patrick Soran; © Backroads/Robert Houser

It's raining hard now, but our guides prove their mettle by shuttling smaller groups of us to three different destinations. Some want to tour the fifteenth-century Château d'Usse, which was an inspiration for Charles Perrault's "Sleeping Beauty." Others are ready to lunch at a nearby vineyard. A third group, which I join, proceeds to the Château de Langeais, with its pepperbox towers and crenallated merlon battlements. In 1491, Charles VIII married fifteen-year-old Anne de Bretagne here, thus uniting France and Brittany. Their nuptials are commemorated with an ensemble of waxwork figures, replete with powdered wigs and tattered ermine. The rooms, one of which features a Luini fresco, are well proportioned and paved in stunning Italian tile. The medieval tapestry collection, one of the largest in France, keeps us entertained as we try to interpret the fables they depict.

But the château's most endearing feature turns out to be its proximity to a French chocolatier. Still damp and bedraggled, we sheepishly sidle into a brightly lit shop across from the Langeais drawbridge. An elegantly dressed matron behind the counter doesn't bat a perfectly mascara'd eye as she ushers us to a table in the far corner. My French phrases successfully produce a dark, fragrant cup *au chocolat* and an oversized meringue—its brittle, baked egg whites shielding a vulnerable heart of caramel.

A steep switchback path through chestnut trees takes us to our hotel for the night, the Château de Rochecotte in the village of St. Patrice, once home to the devious Talleyrand. The forecourt is shielded from the rain by a Lebanon cedar planted during the French Revolution, perhaps by the trickster himself.

The next morning begins a day I remember as paradisiacal. Early on, I miss a turn and get lost—winding aerobically through many miles of fragrant, verdant farmland. I'm as lost as I can be, but who cares? By the grace of the bicycle gods, Backroads has issued every cyclist a Michelin map. So, eventually I manage to weave my way back to the proscribed route and proceed to lunch at Montsereau, downing a crisp green salad and a glass of dry Vouvray. The dark tavern is full of tractor drivers and local shopkeepers eating *croque monsieur* and drinking sturdy glassfuls of *vin de pays.* Authentic back roads, indeed.

Afterwards, I travel alongside freshly mown hay fields, lit with the late afternoon sun. Veering past an intriguing dolmen built thousands of years ago, I join my group at the Abbaye Royale de Fontevraud, a double monastery with separate quarters for nuns and monks. Founded around 1,100 A.D., it was one of the largest abbeys in Europe, and was always governed by an abbess of royal descent. Henry II Plantagenet, his Queen, Eleanor of Aquataine, and their children, Richard the Lionhearted and his sister Joan, were all buried at Fontevraud, and their effigies can still be seen there. After a tour of the abbey, the chapter house, and the octagonal Romanesque kitchen, we bike across a series of rolling knobs, aptly named Beaulieu for their beauty. We stop at the Bouvet-Ladubuy winery in Saumur for a sip of fruity, sparkling red.

A perfect day requires the perfect ending. At Le Prieure, our final hotel, my room is half-way up a circular stairway, and as I throw open the casement windows, an *arc-en-ciel* (rainbow) is ribboning the Loire. At dinner in our private dining room, the staff brings out roasted sea bream, veal with mushrooms and risotto, and a cheese board heavy with Sainte-Maure de Touraine and the colorfully named *crottins de Chevignon* (sheep dung of Chevignon). Next come a tarte Tatin, petits fours, and finally the ultimate vacation treat—robust, after-dinner *café nature.*

I spend my last day of the tour indulging in sheer idleness. While my compatriots ride in the rain, I sleep in. Then I have *café crème* delivered to my room, along with a crusty croissant. I loaf about the hotel and lounge in a Louis XIII upholstered chair (the most comfortable one I have yet encountered) turning the pages of a novel. When the ardent cyclists return, they congratulate me for my foresight in staying in and vow that on the next trip, on their last day, they will do the same.

(Patrick Soran is a Denver-based architect and writer.)

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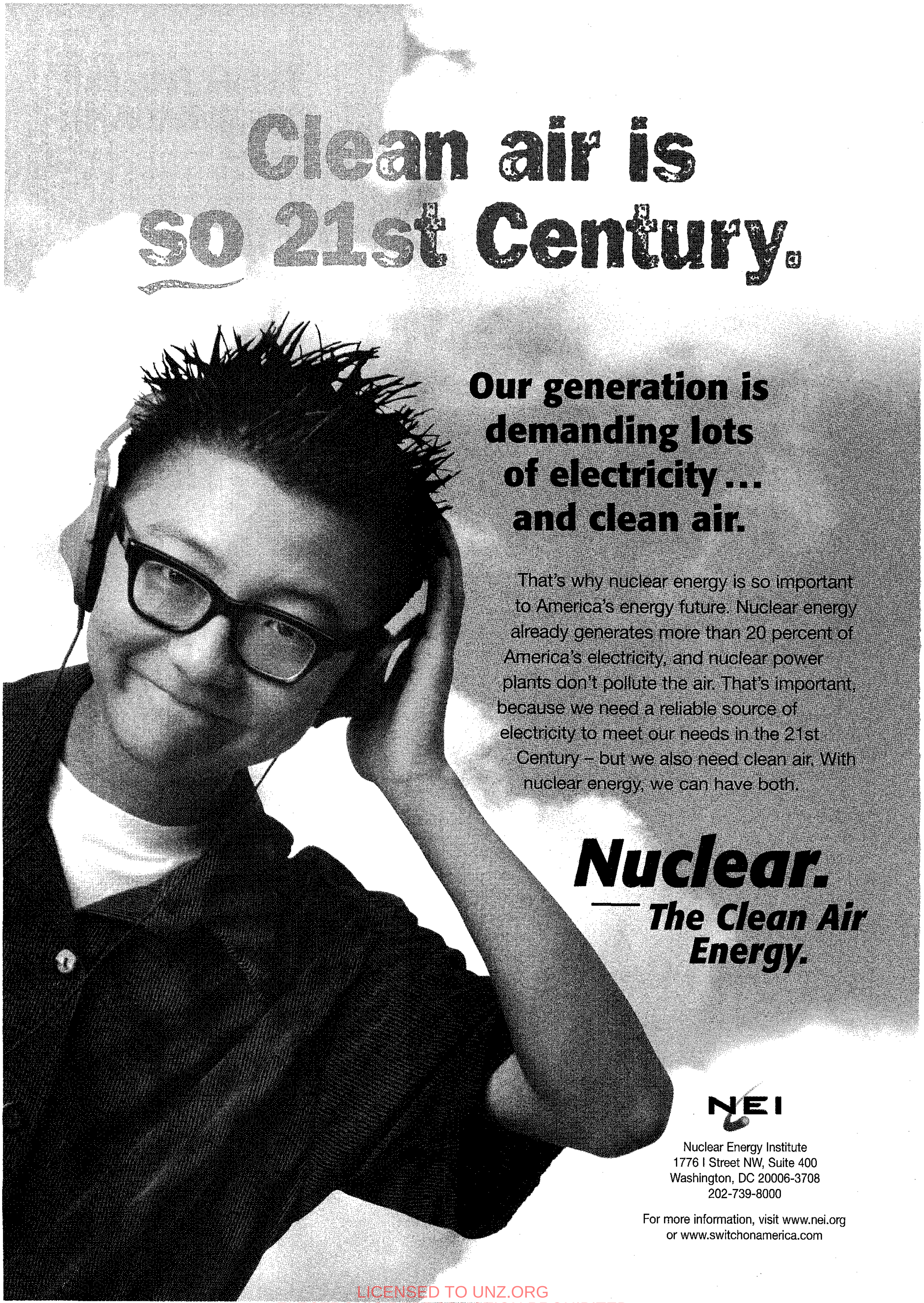

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THE
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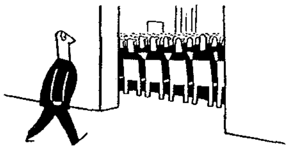
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

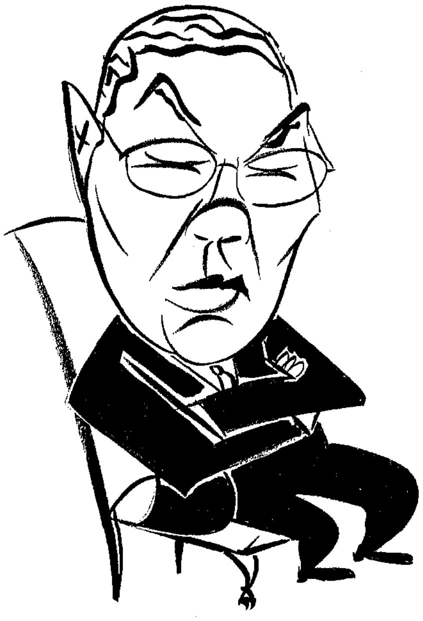
COMMENT
POWELL TAKES A POWDER



He hasn't said a public word about it, but we can be reasonably sure that Colin Powell wanted to be in South Africa this week. The decision to keep the Secretary of State from attending the big United Nations-sponsored conference on racism—it runs through Friday, in Durban—was presented as his own, but the announcement was left to a spokesman. A minor-key emphasis on things African has been practically the only distinctive touch that General Powell has been permitted to bring to the Bush Administration's foreign policy, which so far has been dominated by an unwholesome obsession with missile defense and by such political marginalia as pleasing the anti-abortion lobby. Powell himself has been subjected to a series of small humiliations, notably the White House's torpedoing of the tentative détente between the two halves of Korea. He made no secret of his eagerness to go to Durban, laboring for months to navigate the obstacles, foreign and domestic, in his path. As it is, the United States has sent a small delegation of mid-level diplomats, who may or may not participate in the conference's formal deliberations. Whatever the nature of his reception or the wording of the final document, an appearance by Powell, the highest-ranking African-American government official in history, would probably have been a triumph for him personally and, by extension, for his country. Too bad the opportunity was forgone.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

Of course, rhetorical Woodstocks like the one at Durban invite cynicism and ridicule. Their grandiosity—the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance is the official name of this one—is matched only by their powerlessness. (Not that the latter isn't something to be grateful for.) The virtuous posturing of so many virtue-free governments—in this case, governments that practice, if not outright racism, then such related intolerances as ethnic suppression, religious bigotry, and the systematic violation of human rights—is apt to induce nausea. The waste of time and money is monumental. Yet, if ever there was a U.N. conference at which the United States ought to have been present in a big way, this was it.



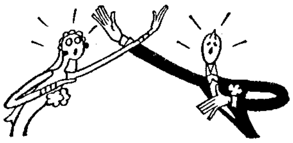
Colin Powell

During the runup to Durban, the Administration made clear its unhappiness with amendments proposed by two groups of countries for the conference's final declaration. The language that seems to have doomed full American participation came from the Islamic bloc, and President Bush was putting it mildly when he described that group's proposal as an effort to "pick on Israel." (A sample: "The World Conference recognizes with deep concern the increase of racist practices of Zionism and anti-Semitism in various parts of the world, as well as the emergence of racial and violent movements based on racism and discriminatory ideas, in particular the Zionist movement, which is based on racial superiority.") Still, in this instance the United States may have been more Zionist than Zion. As late as last week, a spokesman for the Israeli Foreign Ministry said, "We believe we should go to Durban to fight the matter from within." It's a fight the Israelis might lose, but they have the support not only of an unusual range of countries—including, surprisingly, India and France—but also of the conference's convener, the former Irish President Mary Robinson, who is now the U.N.'s high commissioner for human rights. The Administration is right to reject any backsliding toward the "Zionism is racism" calumny, but it evidently prefers to minimize this particular battle rather than follow Israel's instinct to join it with gusto—especially, perhaps, given the current violence in the Middle East, where the United States has been critical of Israel's targeted assassinations of Palestinian militants.

Reparations—for slavery and the slave trade—was the other sticking point about Powell's attendance. But that impasse was resolved to the Administration's satisfaction two weeks before the conference began, thanks largely to the good offices of the South African hosts, who helped broker a compromise. Black African governments and organizations, anxious for American participation, dropped their demands for an overt endorsement of compensation (though not their hopes for more development aid) in exchange for a thorough discussion of slavery coupled with some sort of apology or statement of regret. No one could have delivered that statement better—more subtly, more fully—than Colin Powell. He represents the United States in a way that goes far beyond the high office he holds. He has suffered the pangs of bigotry in his country; he has fought in its wars; he has wielded the power of its government. He supports affirmative action, which, after all, is based on the recognition that America owes itself reparations of a kind. His career is a symbol of the achievements of the civil-rights movement—the third great eruption of the long, continuing American revolution, the first being the War of Independence, the second the Civil War. Each of those eruptions was followed by a period of counter-revolution: the consolidation and expansion of the "Slave Power" after Independence; the betrayal of Reconstruction and the advent of Jim Crow after the Civil War; and the "white backlash" of the late nineteen-sixties and seventies. But the over-all story has been one of fitful progress. If the work of scholars is any guide, America seems readier now than it has ever been to face the harsh truths about its racial past. The next stage of our revolution, when and if it comes, will be gentler.

—Hendrik Hertzberg

VOWS
LOVE, GIULIANI STYLE



Among the mayor of New York's many duties, the least contentious may be presiding over the weddings of couples who seek the honor of being married by Hizzoner. At five o'clock one afternoon last week, in a sitting room at Gracie Mansion, the maritally embattled Rudolph Giuliani wore the countenance of a man who has never known anything but wedded bliss as he administered nuptial vows to a couple who had flown over from London just for the ceremony. The groom was the distinguished British conductor Sir John Eliot Gardiner, and his bride was Isabella de Sabata, a recording producer and the granddaughter of the late Italian maestro Victor de Sabata. They had decided that this was the most romantic way to seal their union—the third marriage for him, the first for her—after meeting the music-loving Mayor at a series of Bach cantatas that Sir John Eliot conducted last December, at St. Bartholomew's Church.

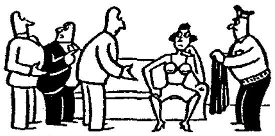
"You didn't forget the marriage license?" the Mayor asked as he beckoned the couple to step forward from a small throng of friends and musical colleagues. After Sir John Eliot produced the appropriate document, the Mayor began the ceremony, under a crystal chandelier, by recalling how, a few years ago, he had agreed to marry the tenor Roberto Alagna and the soprano Angela Gheorghiu, even though they had arrived on his doorstep without a license, the day before they were to sing "La Bohème" at the Met. On this occasion, he paused during his reading of the vows to say a few words about the importance of marriage. Smiling into the faces of the bride and the groom, he reminded them that marriage was the "oldest of human contracts, the oldest deal," and he added that "living together with another person" was greatly to be preferred to living with oneself. "No institution," he said, gave "more support, more strength, more completion." He wished the couple "great joy for the rest of your life," and then, when the groom struggled to get the ring around the bride's finger, urged him to "give it a good push." Finally, he pronounced them husband and wife. One of the guests, the soprano Jeanette Thompson, sang a resonant "I Believe," and when the last high note had died away the Mayor joined in the applause and noted wryly, "I was worried about the chandelier."

As champagne was poured, the talk turned to the differences between the groom's favorite sport and the Mayor's. After listening attentively to Sir John Eliot expound on the intricacies of cricket, the Mayor explained that to be good at baseball you had to know "how to relax." Then, apologizing for the busy weekend ahead of him—it required, he said, his attendance at the funeral of a fireman, and at the Labor Day parade—he again congratulated the newlyweds and wished them well. After the Mayor departed, one of the guests said to Manny Papir, the deputy chief of staff, "He seems like a man who's looking forward to life after City Hall."

"I wouldn't bet on it," Papir said. "But even when he's no longer mayor he'll be able to perform marriages, as long as they're held in one of the five boroughs. It goes with the job."

—Charles Michener

DEPT. OF DÉBUTS
THE SHORTS ON COURT 11



Ashley Harkleroad is a sixteen-year-old professional tennis player from Flintstone, Georgia. Her friends call her Pebbles. She is five feet six and a little tomboyish, with strong legs, a ruddy tennis tan, and blond hair in a long ponytail—attributes that have earned her comparisons to the Russian player and pinup Anna Kournikova, who has never won a pro tournament but nonetheless managed to make more in endorsements last year than any other woman on the tour.

Harkleroad is ranked No. 284 in the world, and last week she made her U.S. Open début in front of a packed stand on Court 11, one of the outer courts at

Flushing Meadows. She was dressed for the occasion in a two-piece Nike outfit, blue with a pattern of colored rectangles, that left her midriff bare. The outfit consisted of a tight Lycra tank top and snug Lycra shorts, with slits up the sides, so that the shorts flared, like a skirt. One spectator thought the shorts might be called "skorts." Another suggested "skunderpants." But according to Nike they're "statement shorts." ("Ashley's sixteen," Mike Nakajima, Nike's domestic director of tennis, says. "She's not going to wear something that's baggy.") In any case, the statement was gratefully received. Fans rooted for her ("Come on, Ashley!"), discussed her looks ("Dude, you think she's hot?"), and trained telephoto lenses on her, as though they were witnessing history, of a kind.

Harkleroad lost the match, dropping the final set 6–love. She exchanged a chilly handshake with her opponent, Meilen Tu, a former junior champion, then brushed past some teen-age boys seeking her autograph and, under the escort of two tournament officials, set off across the grounds, leaving cartoon double takes in her wake.

Twenty minutes later, about forty reporters waited for her in a cramped interview room beneath the main stadium. One woman said to another, "I hate to be like a guy, but she's no Kournikova." Harkleroad arrived wearing a sea-foam-green warmup suit. She sat down in a wicker chair, next to a potted palm, and began fidgeting with a tube of lip balm. The first question came from an enterprising reporter at the front of the room. "That was a really intriguing outfit you were wearing today," he said. "Could you describe it for us, and explain why you decided to wear it?"

"Well, Nike is my sponsor," Harkleroad said. "I went to the Nike room earlier this week and I tried on all the clothes, and they liked me in that outfit best, so . . ."

"Did you think it was too revealing?" the reporter asked.

"I think it was a little revealing, but I like that sometimes. So it was fine with me. And they liked me wearing it, so that's why I wore it."

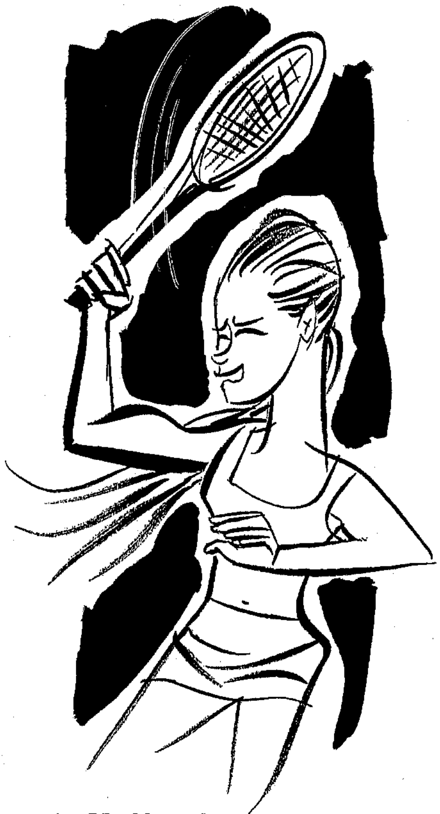
Then came a question that may have been about tennis ("What was the story of that match, from your point of view?"), followed by one that was definitely not ("Did you realize that the crowd was there to watch you—did you feel that they were watching you?"). Twenty or so reporters, all men, were standing against the back wall, many of them smirking.

"The outfit was tight and short, but I like things like that," Harkleroad replied. "Possibly the crowd was on my side a little bit from that outfit."

Finally, the man at the front of the room asked, righteously, "What do you think your mother and father thought of that outfit you wore today?" This elicited a chorus of groans.

"If it's a Nike outfit, then they can't really say that much," Harkleroad said.

A few hours later, two women were doing a little tennis-outfit shopping at a Nike retail booth on the grounds outside the stadium. They were blond, about forty years old—no Kournikovas. One of them was wearing a top like Harkleroad's; the other held up a pair of the shorts. She looked at the price tag (forty dollars), then waved them around, so that they ruffled a bit in the breeze, as they had on Harkleroad. She laid them back on the counter. "I don't think I'm ready for these yet," she said.


Ashley Harkleroad

—*Nick Paumgarten*

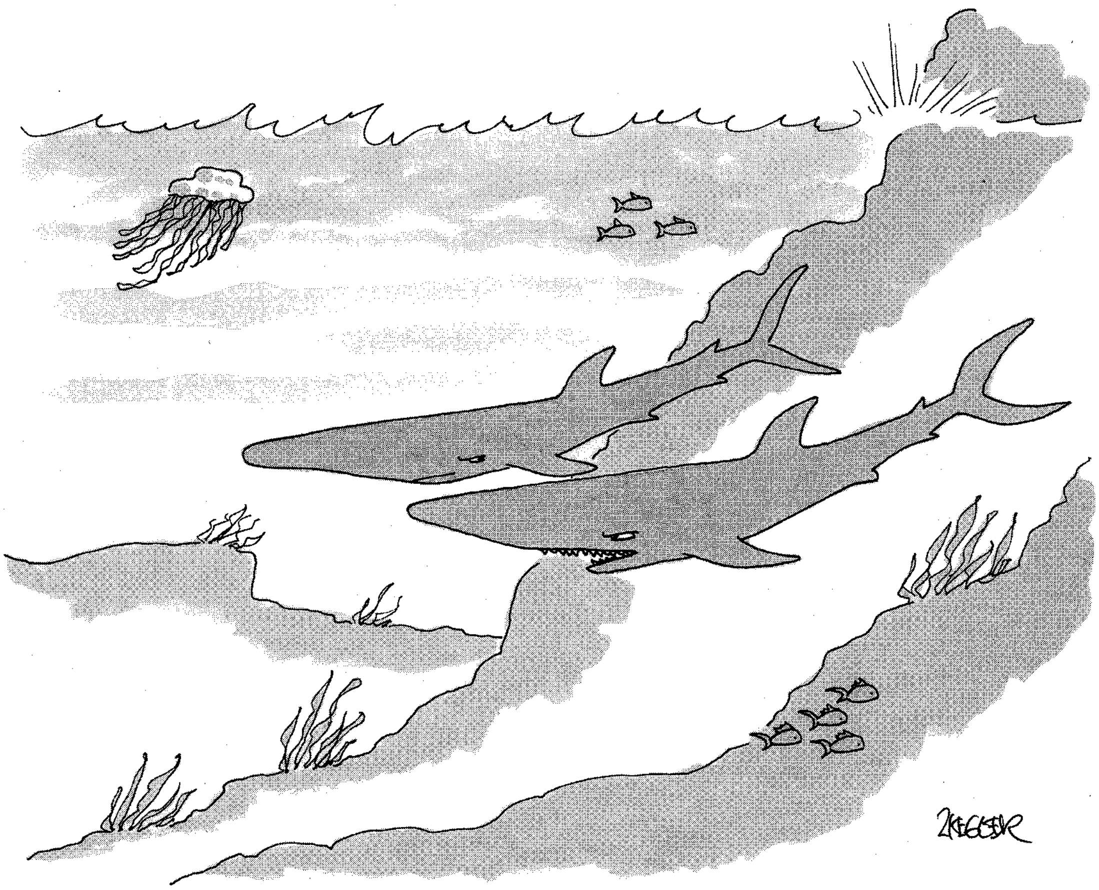
FROM THE ASHES A SYNAGOGUE RISES AGAIN

THIS PROPERTY TO BE IMPROVED BY SAILORS SNUG HARBOR

When a contractor's blowtorch set the roof of Central Synagogue ablaze, three years ago, the building appeared to be a goner. The beams supporting the roof burned and collapsed, in one case breaking through the floor of the sanctuary, and almost everything in the ornate Moorish interior, a multicolored array of hand-stencilled decoration, was destroyed. The building, at the corner of Fifty-fifth Street and Lexington Avenue, was a cherished landmark—the oldest synagogue in continuous use in New York City, and a major work of the man who is sometimes called the city's first Jewish architect, Henry Fernbach. But in August of 1998 it was just a burned-out shell.

The congregation and its intrepid rabbi, Peter Rubinstein, were determined to rebuild. They called in the architect Hugh Hardy, who has made a name for himself as a savior of New York City landmarks. This was somewhat different from most of Hardy's assignments, which have consisted of fixing up places that were a little down at the heels, like Radio City Music Hall and the Rainbow Room. The outer walls of the synagogue were standing, and there were still bits and pieces of the encaustic-tile floor, parts of the wooden doors, and some of the stained glass, but that was it. When Hardy first entered the sanctuary, he says, "the only things remaining were the cast-iron columns supporting the balcony, the balcony itself, and the ark"—an unusually intricate structure topped by a dome.

Rubinstein and his congregants decided that they wanted the synagogue to look as much as possible as it had before the fire. This left Hardy thinking, at first, that he would be unable to do what he likes best, which is to make sure that a restored landmark has a few modern details to indicate the passage of time. In the late nineteen-seventies, Hardy built a quasi-modern town house, on West Eleventh Street, to re-



"To be perfectly honest, I've never ripped into anything that wasn't begging to be ripped into."

• •

place the Greek Revival house that had been blown up by the Weathermen, and ever since then he has believed that there is something a little Disneylandish about making picture-perfect replications of destroyed landmarks. But nobody at Central had any interest in turning the synagogue into a modern building.

Then Hardy figured out how to make his mark. He discovered that Central Synagogue had been renovated before—in 1886, after an earlier fire, and, more drastically, in the early nineteen-forties, by Ely Jacques Kahn, one of New York's most prominent modernist architects. Kahn had stripped off a lot of Fernbach's original ornamental detail. "He was embarrassed by all this decoration—you can see how he simplified it," Hardy said last week, standing under the lobby's lustrous blue ceiling. He decided that the best way to make the building new and different was to make it more like what Fernbach had designed in the first place. "What we have done is much more exuberant than what people here are used to, but it is original to the building," Hardy said. "Now the building is as raucous as ever."

In opting to undo what Kahn had done, Hardy managed to fix what may have been Central Synagogue's biggest aesthetic shortcoming—an odd restraint that makes it look as if Fernbach had been afraid to let himself go. Now the sanctuary is as Fernbach meant it to be, a rich combination of stars and lines and circles and fleurettes, in sixty-nine different shades of red, tan, gold, brown, blue, and apricot, with hardly a bare surface. More than five thousand separate stencils were applied to the walls by hand, in the manner of nineteenth-century wall stencilling. Despite the abundance of decoration, the room is not lush; since so much of the ornamentation is stencilled, not carved, Central Synagogue has a slightly crisp, almost modern feel to it. This isn't one of those old buildings that coddle you. It wakes you up.

At Peter Rubinstein's insistence, Hardy didn't touch the ark, the structure that contains the Torah scrolls. "Peter felt strongly that the ark shouldn't be transformed into a new object—it survived the fire and has a kind of authority," Hardy said. Hardy asserted himself more boldly outside, where he restored some ornamental towers and crenellation that disappeared years ago. And he changed one part of Fernbach's original that he didn't like. He replaced a steep set of steps at the front door with a shorter set and redesigned the main lobby, leaving it two feet lower than it was before. That, in turn, left the sanctuary two feet above the lobby. So Hardy added more steps. That pleased Peter Rubinstein. "This is the way it should be—you rise up into the sanctuary," the rabbi said. "So out of all this trauma comes this brilliance."

—*Paul Goldberger*

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THE FINANCIAL PAGE
GADFLY, INC.

Now that the battle for control of the giant software company Computer Associates is over—it ended when C.A.'s current board of directors was reëlected by shareholders at the company's annual meeting, last Wednesday—what I'll miss most is the big, bold headlines: the plaintive "Mr. Wyly, Please Leave Our Company Alone," the sinister "Sam Wyly Is Still Pulling the Strings," and the ever-reliable "Why Is This Man Smiling?"

Such teasers dominated the full-page ads that Computer Associates, its employees, and its erstwhile foe, a Texas dealmaker named Sam Wyly, ran regularly during the past month and a half in the *Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. Thousands of C.A. workers put out a manifesto, declaring of Wyly, "There is nothing he can do to gain control of us." Wyly's side, meanwhile, described Charles Wang, C.A.'s chairman and co-founder, as a parasitic money-grubber who had the board of directors in his back pocket. And the company, which spent about fifteen million dollars defending itself, depicted Wyly as a nefarious villain who was determined to "derail C.A.'s future."

As it happens, the fight's climax didn't live up to its advance billing. The annual meeting, held in a bleak ballroom in a hotel just off the Long Island Expressway, was more pep rally than smackdown. And Wyly himself, who many had hoped would give a Gordon Gekko-style speech denouncing C.A.'s leaders, said nothing. In a way, his work was done. His months-long campaign to toss out Wang and replace C.A.'s board of directors had already shed plenty of harsh light on the company and its executives. The shareholders knew the score.

Press accounts of Wyly usually refer to him as an "entrepreneur" or a "financier," but really he's another classic American type: the crank. Short and slight, with long gray hair and a Texas twang, Wyly is a man of many enthusiasms. In the course of a checkered but lucrative career as a buyer and seller of companies, he has run two software firms, one telecom company (which lost a hundred million dollars trying to compete with A. T. & T.), the Bonanza steakhouse chain, a chain of boutiques named after his then wife, an arts-and-crafts retailer (the industry "gorilla," according to Wyly), and, most recently, a renewable-energy firm. Last year, he won some notoriety for orchestrating a $2.5-million stealth attack on John McCain for being soft on the environment. The green knight he was fighting for? George W. Bush.

When it came to C.A., though, Wyly, who sold his company, Sterling Software, to C.A. last year, chose his target well. Over the previous five years, C.A. stock had risen just eight per cent, while the S. & P. 500 had soared eighty-five per cent. At the same time, the company's board had awarded a staggering billion-dollar bonus to its three top dogs, including Wang and Sanjay Kumar, the president and C.E.O. (A shareholder lawsuit forced them to give back a couple of hundred million.) In April of this year, *Business Week* said that Wang had delivered shareholders less value in return for his pay than any other executive in America (and in this category the competition is pretty stiff). Wang and his cronies seemed to view the company as a private fiefdom—and Wyly's proxy challenge as a personal affront. When Wang was asked if he'd learned anything from the proxy fight, he said, "We need to communicate better. We are not the greatest politicans and campaigners." It was as though the company's dismal performance were just a matter of bad spin.

The appearance of a rabble-rouser like Wyly, with his spirited talk of shareholder rights and the virtues of managerial accountability, was inevitable. Since the nineteen-eighties, corporate raiders and shareholder activists have forced American companies to be more attentive to the people who actually own them. Most C.E.O.s know that if their stock price lags they'll get the bum's rush; "shareholder value" is now corporate America's version of "Jesus saves."

Wyly's campaign to end Wang's cushy sinecure may have failed, but at least it put C.A. on notice. In fact, Wyly seems to have found his calling, as the country's wealthiest corporate gadfly. Corporate gadflies are those people who show up at annual meetings across the country to ask annoying questions about what the managers are up to. The most famous gadfly, Lewis D. Gilbert, started his career in 1933 at a Consolidated Gas meeting and hectored corporate executives for the next sixty years. Another legend, Evelyn Y. Davis, appeared at a G.M. annual meeting dressed in a bathing suit and once said to John Reed, the Citibank C.E.O., "Let me tell you something, my dear. I've got you by the balls." But these people owned tiny stakes, and tended not to have enough money to mount serious proxy challenges. Wyly could change that. As C.A. discovered, he's rich enough, and persistent enough, to be more than just a petty annoyance. Last week, after his defeat, Wyly looked rather pleased with himself as he spoke at length about his commitment to shareholder rights. He'd seen the light, and now he was going to spread the word.

The timing is good. In the bull market, almost every executive was a genius; only the surliest of shareholders begrudged the boss his bloated pay. But in a bear market the good will evaporates. Shareholders grow restless and reach for the pitchforks. These days, C.E.O.s have more explaining to do. The question of who really owns a company—the shareholders or the brass—gets played out in big, bold type. Charles Wang may have kept his job this time. But who's smiling now?

—*James Surowiecki*

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

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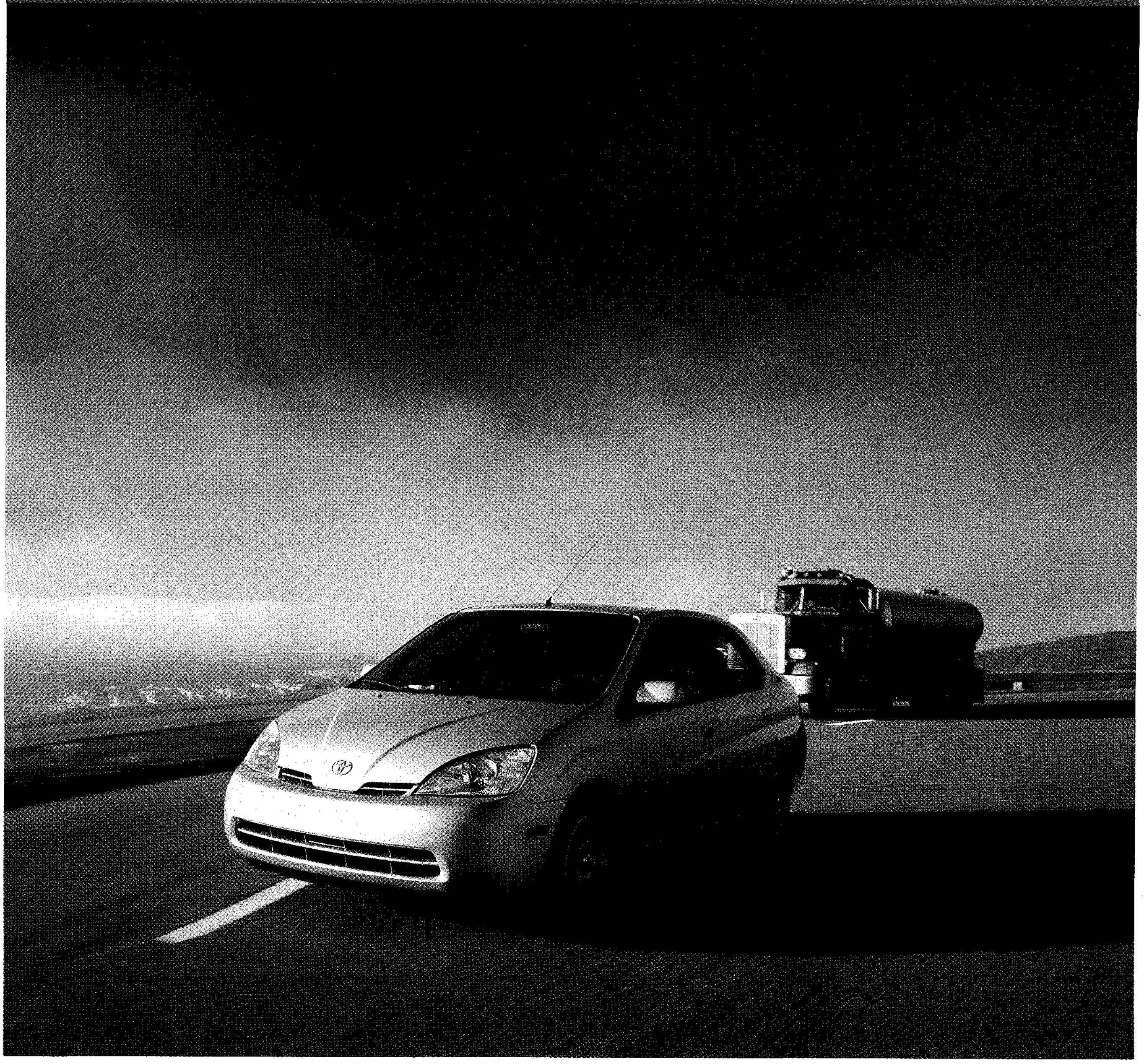

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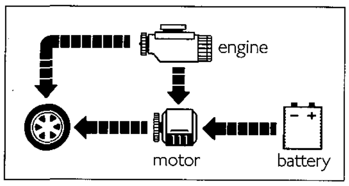

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LETTER FROM WASHINGTON

WILLIAM JENNINGS BUSH

The President has a plan to redraw the map for 2004.

BY NICHOLAS LEMANN

Bush has been visiting regular-folks venues, in states where the election was close.

ERIC PALMA

On the last Sunday in August, I went to Pennsylvania to watch President Bush wind up his "Home to the Heartland" tour, which wasn't so much a tour as a series of short forays that punctuated the month he spent at his ranch, in Crawford, Texas. This time, on his way to being inducted into the Little League Hall of Excellence, in Williamsport, Bush stopped at a steel mill in the Monongahela Valley to attend a picnic for steelworkers and their families. There are probably more sylvan spots for a summer picnic; this one was held in an asphalt interior courtyard surrounded by long battleship-gray corrugated-steel industrial structures out of a Charles Sheeler painting. But the picnickers' real purpose was not recreation, it was lobbying—for strict limits on imported steel, a cause on which labor and management are in agreement. U.S. Steel sponsored the event, and a procession of company and United Steel Workers' officials and politicians warmed up the crowd for Bush by issuing calls from the podium for a "level playing field" for the steel industry.

As usual, Bush arrived precisely on time, at the head of an entourage that included his wife, Laura, two Cabinet secretaries, and the governor of Pennsylvania, Tom Ridge. The President was the most informally dressed and the most suntanned member of the group. He spent an hour and a half at the picnic—an eternity in the realm of Presidential scheduling—and most of that time he devoted to one of the primal activities of politics, moving along the edge of a surging crowd shaking hands, hugging, holding babies, signing autographs, and posing for pictures. Bush's quotient of charisma is below that of a rock star—it was possible for people to sit eating heaping plates of fried chicken and sausages while he was shaking hands fifty feet away—but he appeared to be enjoying himself, and people seemed to come away thinking, You know, he's a good guy. Ross McClellan, Sr., the union-local president at the factory, who sat next to Bush at lunch, left the President's company positively aglow. "He told me he puts on his pants the same way I do," he reported to his friends.

The speakers reminded the crowd that in June Bush had ordered up an investigation of unfair trade practices by foreign steel manufacturers. This seems like a modest favor, since no one knows its outcome, but because Bill Clinton had declined to do the same thing Bush could plausibly appear in hero's guise at a steelworkers' picnic. At the podium, he presented himself as a humble, decent, uxorious, God-fearing, unpretentious man, perhaps a little rascally, who stands in opposition to the federal government over which he presides. "Congress is on vacation," he said. "The country's never run better." And, a little later, "Washington passes laws, but it doesn't pass values legislation. Values exist in the hearts and souls of our citizens."

Where Presidents travel domestically is determined according to the political art called targeting; a location is never accidental. Bush and the people close to him have got to be exquisitely aware that he lost the popular vote in 2000 and, through the defection of Jim Jeffords, lost the Senate in 2001 and that his advantage in the House will be lost in 2002 if the Democrats get the traditional off-year gain for the party that doesn't control the White House. Political wisdom is that after taking office you nail down your base and repay your contributors, and then you switch your attention to winning converts. That is what Bush has to do now.

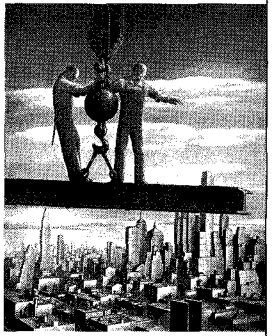
If union steelworkers in the Monongahela Valley (many of them Catholic gun owners) are an example of the hoped-for new Bush voter, that's interesting. Al Gore is eternally consigned to be the answer to the trivia question "Which Presidential candidate lost his home state?" It's worth noting that Bush lost to Gore by a wide margin in the state where he was born, Connecticut. Although Bush moved to Texas as a toddler, his connection to his birthplace is not faint. His grandfather was a United States senator from Connecticut. Gerald Ford carried Connecticut in 1976, Ronald Reagan carried it in 1980 and 1984, and George H. W. Bush carried it in 1988. Not only did George W. Bush lose Connecticut in the general election; he lost the Connecticut Republican primary, to John McCain. McCain even carried the Bush family seat, Greenwich.

In earlier generations, states like Connecticut and Vermont, Jim Jeffords's home, made up the heart of the Republican Party in Presidential politics, while places like Tennessee and West Virginia, the site of another surprising Bush victory last fall, belonged to the Democrats. The historic shifts in regional political loyalties, which between the late nineteen-sixties and the late nineteen-eighties seemed to be running in a strongly Republican direction, now seem to be bidirectional. The South, the agricultural Midwest, and the mountain West are the Republican base. Clinton, during his time as the head of the Democrats, nailed down the Northeast, the Great Lakes states, and the West Coast for his Party. Hence the striking electoral map of the 2000 Presidential election, which, as it became familiar from constantly being projected on television screens, represented a shorthand way of thinking about the country: there's Red America, the Bush-voting center; and Blue America, the Gore-voting perimeter.

Bush seems to feel his Red Americaness deeply. The more relaxed he is, the more he talks about it. When he arrived in Crawford in early August, a reporter asked him a question indicating dissatisfaction with the hundred-degree heat, and Bush shot back, "This is Texas. I know a lot of you wish you were in the East Coast, lounging on the beaches, sucking in the salt air, but when you're from Texas, and love Texas, this is where you come home; this is my home. We built a house in the Crawford area; it'll be the house where I live in for the rest of my life." (A couple of weeks later, when a reporter teased Bush by saying he'd been away "sucking up salt air on the West Coast," Bush's instant comeback was "Brie and cheese?"—which was not only funny but message-reinforcing, since it communicated that Bush is too country to know that Brie *is* cheese.) In public statements during the month, Bush favorably compared Crawford with Washington, which he usually called "Washington, D.C.," the city where people would rather take positions than get things done, like in Texas. Whenever Bush left town, it was always to go to regular-folks venues, such as a Harley-Davidson plant in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, a Target store in Kansas City, and the steel mill where I caught his act—in states with no ocean frontage, where the last election had been very close.

For the past couple of years, Karl Rove, who has functioned as chief adviser to Bush throughout his political career, has been fond of comparing the 2000 and 1896 Presidential elections. In 1896, William McKinley beat William Jennings Bryan by putting together a coalition of the rising industrial regions of the country, which wound up becoming the geographic basis of a Republican majority that dominated national politics until the Great Depression. What's interesting about Rove's comparison now—as John Milton Cooper, Jr., a University of Wisconsin historian, observes in a forthcoming book of essays on the 2000 election—is that Bush's territory resembles Bryan's, not McKinley's. McKinley took all

SWANN
AUCTIONS



Samuel Margolies, "Builders of Babylon," aquatint and etching, 1949.

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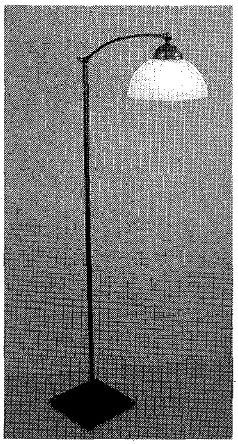

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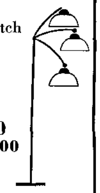

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the Northeastern and Great Lakes states, plus California and Oregon—Blue America—and Bryan got the South and the West.

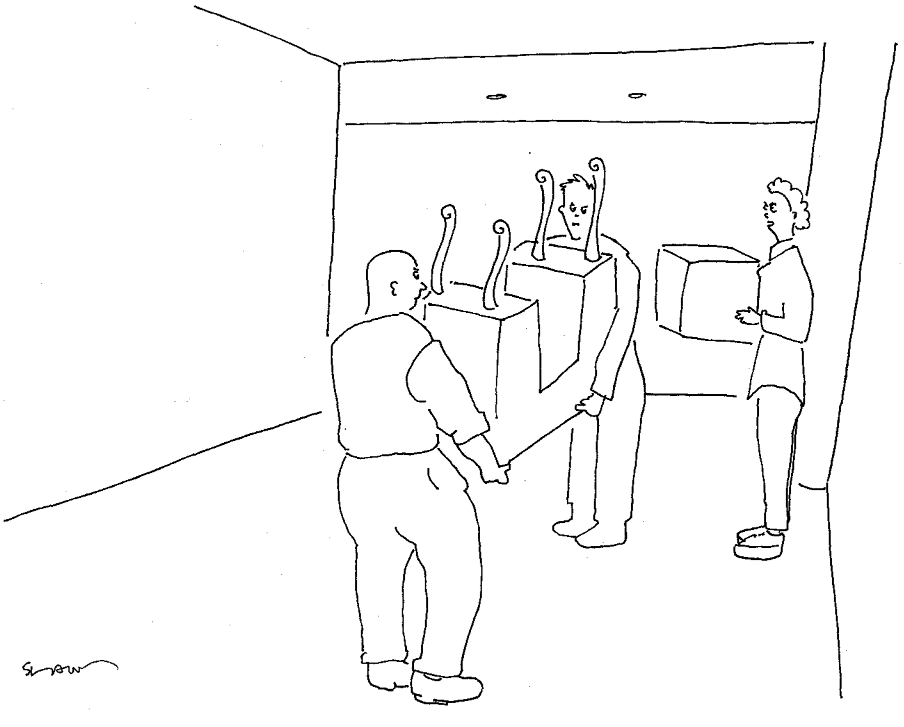
I don't think this is entirely a coincidence. Like Bryan, Bush is a populist—an unlikely populist, given his background, but evidently a sincere one. As a politician, he appeals, as Bryan did, far more to the middle of the country than to the coasts, and more to the small towns and farms than to the metropolitan areas. Like Bryan, he seems to stand more with religion than with science, more with what the Populists called "producers" than with financiers, and more for the United States operating solo in the world than for its being entwined in a system of international entanglements. Bryan was florid and Bush is straightforward, but the rhetoric of both contains a large dose of resentment of the fancy people in the sophisticated areas. It would be hard to find a purer example of the proposition that the same thought can be expressed in quite different ways than by placing Bush's Crawford pronouncements next to this one of Bryan's, from the "Cross of Gold" speech:

> Ah, my friends, we say not one word against those who live upon the Atlantic coast, but the hardy pioneers who have braved all the dangers of the wilderness, who have made the desert to blossom as the rose—the pioneers away out there, who rear their children near to Nature's heart, where they can mingle their voices with the voices of the birds—out there where they have erected schoolhouses for the education of their young, churches where they praise their Creator, and cemeteries where rest the ashes of their dead—these people, we say, are as deserving of the consideration of our party as any people in this country. It is for these that we speak.

Bush, in his public self-presentation, glorifies simplicity and "heart"; without using specifically religious language, he traffics in the evangelical Christian ideal of leadership by a simple, good man. As he reminded the press several times during August, he is going to deal with Vladimir Putin by bringing him to Crawford and talking man to man—pointing to this rather than to their official summit meeting in Shanghai, where they would be surrounded by diplomatic experts. The dramatic climax of Bush's month in Crawford, his speech on stem-cell research, may have represented his making a compromise, but it also underscored his Bryanism. Of the hundreds of things a President works on, he decides which issues to elevate to primary national importance. Bill Clinton chose not to draw attention to stem-cell research. Bush made it the subject of his only televised prime-time address as President so far. The next morning, his aides gave a lavish supplementary briefing to explain in detail how he had reached his position, as they have done on no other issue since he became President. The impression Bush created was that he shares the basic premises of the right-to-life movement about the rights of the unborn, and that he and the people around him consider the moral compass, as opposed to some more advanced and technical instrument, to be his most important piece of equipment.

There is a connection between Bush's Bryanism and the search for new Republican voters. One might think that Bush, the tax cutter and regulation lifter, would look for them in affluent, traditionally Republican suburbs. Instead, if I am reading the signals correctly, he appears to believe that the most promising course is to push the boundaries of Red America just a little farther outward, by persuading middle-class, small-town heartlanders who have traditionally been Democrats to switch. That is what he was doing in the Monongahela Valley. Trying to raid Democratic territory demonstrates a certain strategic bravado on Bush's part, but it also raises a question: Why is the old Republican Northeast and Midwest such a tough sell for him?

I got only one real chance to suck in salt air with those who live upon the Atlantic Coast this summer, and that was when I interviewed Representative Christopher Shays on the deck of his house in Bridgeport, Connecticut, which overlooks a pretty little sailboat-filled cove of Long Island Sound. I had made a small project of checking in with moderate Republican congressmen, who are a strikingly regionalized group. Their home territory is the Northeast, with outposts in the Midwestern suburbs and in coastal California. Not much had been heard from them as a group for decades, as their party's base moved relentlessly south and west following Barry Goldwater's Presidential campaign in 1964, but after Jeffords left his party, this spring, they seemed to be reëmerging. Moderates voted against the Bush Administration and their leadership in the House on a series of issues: drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife



"Oh, just break it anywhere."

Refuge, faith-based social programs, air-quality standards, the patients' bill of rights, and, the most dramatic example—with Shays leading a revolt that barely failed—campaign-finance reform. (Shays has gathered the signatures of more than two hundred House members on a petition for the reintroduction of his bill in the fall.)

The scene at Shays's residence—a neat, white Colonial house with chintz sofas and a copy of "Millie's Book," by Barbara Bush, on the coffee table; the slender, polite, prematurely white-haired Shays; an American flag flying next to the front door; sailboats in the Sound—bespoke Republicanism, and Shays insisted that he is a real Republican. He told me that his introduction to politics was riding his bike, as a small boy, down to the Republican headquarters in Darien to get an "I Like Ike" button.

"What's happened in my district is this," he said. "The Democratic Party isn't stronger. The Republican Party is weaker. Independents predominate." Shays's district is the one that the Bush family came from, by the way. "The more the Republican Party becomes the party of the South, the Southwest, and the West, the less relevant the Republican Party will be in New England. The more Jesse Helms, Strom Thurmond, Trent Lott, Dick Armey, and Tom DeLay are viewed as representing the Party, the harder it is for me to win elections. George W. Bush is a Texan. He is proud of it. He doesn't think like somebody from Greenwich, Connecticut. Here's a great example: George W. went to Europe *once* before he became President. That's mind-boggling to somebody from this district, especially considering his family background."

Most of the moderates have a similar story about their districts to tell. Mike Castle, of Delaware, who heads the Republican Main Street Partnership, a three-year-old organization of House and Senate moderates whose most prized recent recruit is John McCain, told me that the first time he ran for the state legislature, in 1966, rural downstate Delaware was Democratic and the suburbs of Wilmington were Republican. Now downstate is the Republican base and the suburbs swing (though not the way they did in "The Ice Storm," which was set in Christopher Shays's district). "Even the corporate chieftains aren't Republican anymore," Castle said. Beginning in 1952, Delaware voted for the winner in every Presidential election until 2000, when it voted for Gore.

The moderates' distance from their party is cultural as much as political. Evangelicals are not a strong presence in their districts today, and even when they were, in the nineteenth century, they were a liberal pressure group, not a conservative one. The moderates, and their constituents, are uncomfortable with politics and religion blending together. The moderates have a different style from that of the House leadership. They don't use ideological rhetoric. They don't rail against liberals. The government shutdown engineered by Newt Gingrich, the former Speaker, and the impeachment of Clinton played poorly in their districts. The moderates even look different from the conservatives, being more likely to resemble reedy country parsons than prosperous automobile dealers.

They are heirs to the Progressive tradition, with its view of government as an honorable profession to be practiced by experts, and of business interests as a corrupting force. One aide to a moderate Republican congressman told me, horrified, about a meeting he and his boss had held with a lobbyist for Peabody Coal about legislation to renew the federal Clean Coal Technology Program, a perfect example of an initiative born in a reform spirit which has evolved into a subsidy for an industry. "I wrote that bill!" the lobbyist proclaimed, showing a wounded author's pride at the idea that a member of the legislative branch of government would presume to alter it.

Politicians have to think first about being reëlected, and therefore the moderates are less worried about incurring the displeasure of their party leadership than about the possibility of facing Democratic opponents who would be pro-choice and pro-environment but conservative on budget and spending issues, and who would try to identify them with the national Republican leadership. I asked another of the moderates, Rob Simmons, who represents a district in eastern Connecticut, how one would run against him. "You link me to Bush and Cheney," he said. "I'm a toady of President Bush. I'm in league with the oil industry. None of that is true, but truth matters less in politics than it used to." Simmons, a freshman, barely won in

"It seems like only yesterday that you were a juvenile offender."

a district that had been represented by Democrats for the preceding twenty-six years. What if Bush offered to come to the district next fall and campaign for him? Simmons did not leap at the possibility. "Hopefully he would come to discuss something relevant to the district, like the military, or infrastructure," he said. "Prescription drugs would have a lot of currency. If he came to talk about his position on stem-cell research, or about, perhaps, even faith-based programs, I don't think there'd be much enthusiasm."

What the moderates see as self-preservation has, however, incurred the wrath of the right wing of their party. The year after Mike Castle and his colleagues created the Republican Main Street Partnership, a young supply-sider named Stephen Moore set up a lobbying group in Washington called the Club for Growth, which finances conservative primary opponents of moderate Republicans. "The enemy isn't so much Dick Gephardt"—the House minority leader—"as it is Mike Castle," Moore told me with a grin. In the 2000 elections, its first cycle, the Club for Growth targeted the ten-term incumbent Marge Roukema, of New Jersey, but she beat back her primary challenger and is still in the House. In 2002, Moore told me, he plans to target two more Republican moderates. (He once wrote an article in *The American Spectator* called "Who Needs the Northeast?") This spring, Moore sent a letter to all the Republican moderates in the House vowing to find primary opponents for them if they voted against Bush's tax cut. After telling me this, he held up his thumb and index finger to form a circle. "Zero. Nobody voted against us. We sent the letter to thirty people. None of them wanted to suffer the same near-death experience as Marge Roukema. We did the same thing in the Senate, but it didn't work as well, because we hadn't been involved in races and they weren't afraid of us. We ran ads attacking the senators who voted against the tax cut in their states. Not too long after that, Jeffords defected. That was a bad thing. If I'd known that might happen, I wouldn't have run the ad in Vermont."

In theory, the leadership and the Administration should be afraid of the moderates, who number at least twenty in a House that has a Republican majority of ten. Instead, the moderates, for all their rebellions of the spring and summer, have not yet won a single battle. Part of their problem, if it is a problem, is precisely that they are moderate—they tend to be loyal and well mannered. John Podesta, who was Clinton's chief of staff and now teaches at Georgetown Law School, recently told me, "I used to say, when I was in the White House, anybody who came into my office with a strategy built around the House moderates, I'd throw them out. Because they always collapsed." That is one reason Bush has been able to govern as if he had a mandate, when he doesn't. But what he probably is not going to be able to do is pick up political support in the moderates' territory. The moderates themselves may be holding for Bush, but their districts are long gone.

Earlier this year, Congress passed President Bush's budget for fiscal 2002, based on revenue estimates that now appear to have been far too optimistic. The main action in Washington this fall will have to do with numbers—in particular with Social Security, which is the rare federal program that has its own tax. These days, Social Security takes in far more in taxes than it pays out in benefits. When the baby-boom generation retires, that will no longer be the case.

In his State of the Union Message in 1998, Bill Clinton, by unveiling the slogan "save Social Security first," introduced the idea that whatever was left over of the Social Security tax monies after benefits had been paid should be put into a trust fund for the baby boomers' retirement. By the time Al Gore ran for President, the trust fund had metaphorically morphed into the "ironclad lockbox" that Darrell Hammond made fun of on "Saturday Night Live." There is no actual Social Security trust fund—it's only a construct, which didn't exist until the sixty-sixth year of the program and has no legislative authority behind it. But Clinton saw it as a way to make Republican tax cuts seem like tampering with the sacrosanct Social Security program, and Bush, during the campaign, appeared to accept the trust-fund idea.

A few days before Bush got back to Washington from Crawford, the Congressional Budget Office issued numbers indicating that, with the tax cut and the bad economy, the federal government won't be taking in enough money to avoid dipping slightly into the Social Security trust fund. This signalled the start of a giant game of chicken. Gephardt and Senator Tom Daschle, the Democratic leaders in their respective houses, who are both thinking about running for President in 2004, will try to force Bush into a choice between cutting the budgets of the two government departments he wants to spend more on, Education and Defense, and picking the ironclad lockbox. If it's the latter, the Democrats will accuse him of having raided Social Security in order to cut taxes for the rich. Bush will counter by accusing the Democrats of being irresponsible big spenders. (Both sides have fired opening salvos already, in the form of brief negative advertising campaigns; the Democrats' ad aired in Crawford, the Republicans' in Daschle's and Gephardt's home towns.)

The whole routine is deeply fake—Social Security isn't in imminent danger, and the budget-balancing Democrats are anything but big spenders—but it represents a real question, which is whether the federal government should be nourished, so that it can stand ready to solve national problems, or starved, so it cannot grow. As the game plays out, it will present Bush with choices that will reveal more about his political intentions. He has very efficiently got rid of all the extra money available to the federal government, by cutting taxes so much. If he accepts the current Democratic formulation, in which fiscal prudence generally and the Social Security surplus in particular are sacred, it will suggest that he wants to fight for the unlikely new Democratic political territory in the sophisticated suburbs. That's what a legatee of William McKinley would do. But, if he's really William Jennings Bush, the President of Red America, he'll just let the numbers go out of whack, keep his new programs for the school kids and our brave men in uniform, and say that anybody who disagrees with him is just stuck in that old way of thinking that they have up in Washington, D.C. ♦

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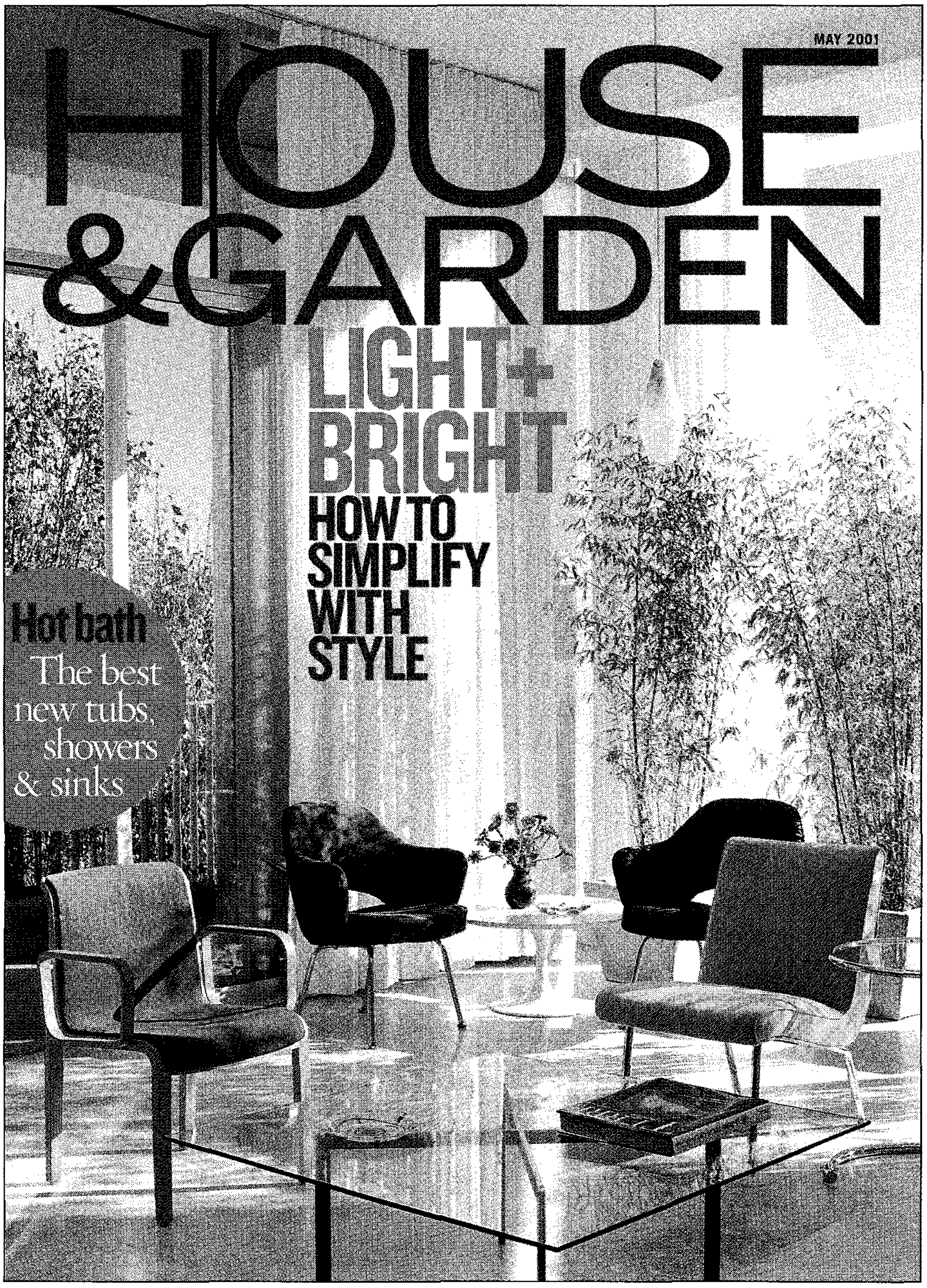
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SHOUTS & MURMURS

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

BY NOAH BAUMBACH

> If your therapist has any relationship with you in addition to the therapeutic one, that additional relationship can interfere with your therapy. If, for example, the therapist hires you to paint the therapist's office and then complains about your work, how will that make you feel about the therapist's ability to help you? Also, if the therapist is angry about the paint job, how can that anger be separated from the therapist's feelings about you as a client?
>
> —*From "How to Choose a Therapist," in Self Help magazine.*

Treatment notes for patient, initials N.B., No. VII, by Sheldon Papadametrio, Ph.D.

Session 24

For weeks, N. has said that he feels worthless. He complains of "emptiness," and of lacking a "sense of purpose." He loves S., but he can't seem to move in with her. He wants success and wealth, but he can't motivate himself or properly pursue these goals. He has purchased the brushes and the roller, but he has noticeably skirted the subject of putting them to use. Then, today, while talking about his family's summers on Shelter Island, he says, "I think I'll start with a primer on the north wall and we can see how we like the color." Progress.

Session 25

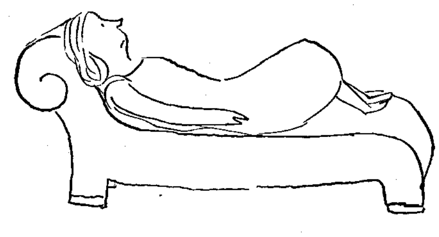
N. seems to be in high spirits today. He has decided that S. and he are going to move in together. I take this as a good opportunity to bring out the color swatches I've been privately agonizing over. N.'s first reaction is to identify people and objects in the various hues, but after I explain that these are not Rorschachs he is able to adjust, with little embarrassment. We both agree that the Manila is too yellow, and the Durango Dust too mustardy, but when I propose the Navajo White he grows quiet. After a prolonged silence, he suggests Bluebell and Kidney Bean, both clearly absurd choices. Later, I check my notes and find that in Session 7 N. referred to the "blue of my nursery" and "my mother's bean pallor when she blushed." Interesting: he's trying to remake the office into a childhood memory while simultaneously resisting my choice in paint. By eschewing the father's authoritative desires, he seeks to return to the womb.

Session 26

N. discusses the chronic trouble he has finishing what he starts. He hasn't touched his novel about crickets in three months, graduate-school applications are piled up on his desk, and now that he and S. have agreed to live together he feels paralyzed. I remind him that often in life we need to lay down not only a primer but two or three coats on top of that, and to sand in between. Before I can extend the metaphor to sealant and latex, he snaps, "I'll get to it. What are you, my mother?" Now we're getting somewhere.

Session 27

We conduct this session at Janovic Plaza, in the paint-swatch aisle. N. is insecure at first, refusing to state a preference. However, after I show genuine interest in his opinion he slowly points to a hideous green called Celery. I try to subtly shift his focus toward the linen whites and taupes, but he won't get off Celery. "It's awfully green," I say. But it's N.'s decision, and I don't want to discourage him from articulating an honest feeling. The clerk has to call a manager to find out how to mix the color, and I'm a few minutes late to meet F. in Draperies.



JAMES THURBER, 8/24/1940

Session 28

The primer coat: N.'s brushstrokes go horizontally—common in narcissists—calling attention to themselves. I've moved the couch out of the office to avoid any messes, so our session is conducted with N. on a ladder and me in a tarp-covered folding chair below. He seems uncomfortable with the sudden authority granted to him, and rebels: paint splatters onto my espadrilles. An accident, he says.

Session 29

N. wants to know what I think about his moving in with S. "Am I doing it to please my father?" he asks. "To please you?" I ask if it pleases him. "I guess so," he says. "But how will I know if I've made the right decision?" Curiously, that is just what I was thinking as he finished the first coat: the Celery, as I predicted, registers much darker now. It certainly appeared more sage on the swatch.

Related research notes: In 1905, Freud had Dora do some electrical work, and Jung wrote extensively about his roofer. My mentor Ledbetter, of course, wrote a dissertation entitled "On Treatment and Tiling: Gestalt and Grout." When I consult with Ledbetter about N., he recounts the story of a client who did some carpentry for him. It started when the patient repeatedly expressed feelings of "unsteadiness." Ledbetter soon noticed that her chair was wobbling, and he suggested wedging a matchbook under one leg. But the patient wanted to sand down the other legs to make everything even. After she experienced success, she moved on to building Ledbetter a credenza and a TV cart. The patient felt needed and Ledbetter got a bargain. When I express doubts about N. finishing the paint job, Ledbetter says to be patient: "Whatever time frame they give you, double it."

Session 30

Is there a way to fire N. as a painter while keeping him on as a patient? I find the conflicts he exhibits between his true and false selves fascinating and treatable. His painting skills, however, are crude bordering on hopeless. Today, he painted over one of my most accessible outlets. But maybe my disappointment with N.'s paint job is the result of some internal conflict in myself. Will consult with Ledbetter regarding countertransference in these instances.

Session 31

N. doesn't feel like painting today, as he and S. have split up. He doesn't even climb the ladder—just sits right down with me on the tarp. When I suggest that he take it easy, maybe just prime some trim with the glossy, he barks, "You *would* say that!" Then, with no prompting, he describes an image from his childhood: his mother is crying, leaning over the kitchen sink. "What else do you remember about this scene?" I ask. "Her dress has orange flowers on it. The counter is an avocado Formica, the floor a buttery linoleum . . ." "Go on," I say. "I can't remember any more," he says. "The walls," I say. "What do you remember about the walls?" "The walls," he says. "The walls are . . . white . . . but not white-white. They're off-white. Almost linen . . . Navajo White." He bursts into tears. A breakthrough. We'll repaint.

Session 32

N. is a no-show. I note how much smaller the room looks with green walls and no furniture. Do I really need such a large couch?

Session 33

N. calls. He's ceasing treatment. I'm gravely disappointed; we've made some significant leaps in the past few months. W. has been doing touch-ups during his Monday sessions, and now that we've settled on the Navajo I can see an end to this journey. Although I disagree with N.'s decision, I take his certainty as an encouraging sign. Later, I meet Ledbetter for a Martini. N. has been seeing him for three weeks, he says, and although he's been unable to penetrate N.'s false self, N. has been doing some first-rate plumbing. "You remember that toilet in the waiting room, how it used to run? Four sessions and it's fixed." ♦

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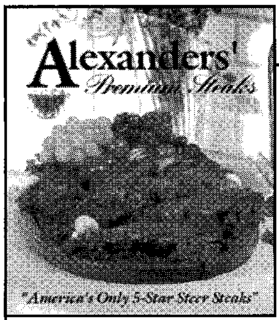
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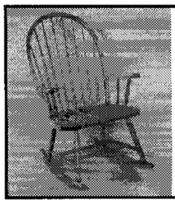

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THE SPORTING SCENE

DRUGSTORE ATHLETE

To beat the competition, first you have to beat the drug test.

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

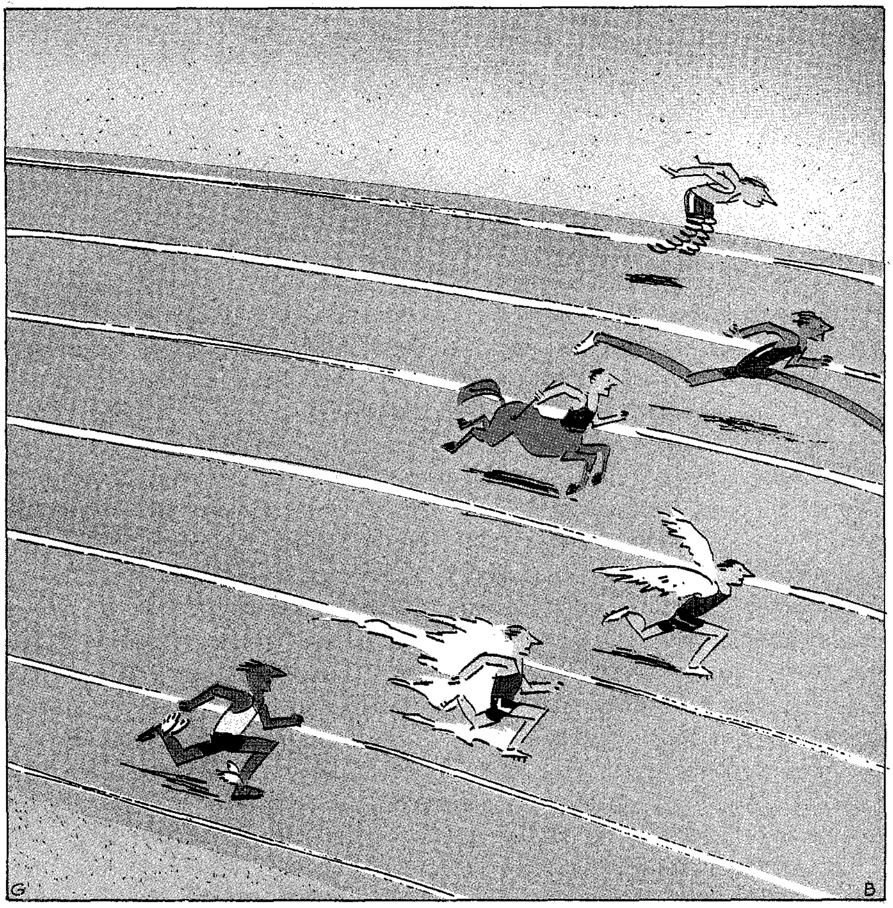
At the age of twelve, Christiane Knacke-Sommer was plucked from a small town in Saxony to train with the élite SC Dynamo swim club, in East Berlin. After two years of steady progress, she was given regular injections and daily doses of small baby-blue pills, which she was required to take in the presence of a trainer. Within weeks, her arms and shoulders began to thicken. She developed severe acne. Her pubic hair began to spread over her abdomen. Her libido soared out of control. Her voice turned gruff. And her performance in the pool began to improve dramatically, culminating in a bronze medal in the hundred-metre butterfly at the 1980 Moscow Olympics. But then the Wall fell and the truth emerged about those little blue pills. In a new book about the East German sports establishment, "Faust's Gold," Steven Ungerleider recounts the moment in 1998 when Knacke-Sommer testified in Berlin at the trial of her former coaches and doctors:

> "Did defendant Gläser or defendant Binus ever tell you that the blue pills were the anabolic steroid known as Oral-Turinabol?" the prosecutor asked. "They told us they were vitamin tablets," Christiane said, "just like they served all the girls with meals." "Did defendant Binus ever tell you the injection he gave was Depot-Turinabol?" "Never," Christiane said, staring at Binus until the slight, middle-aged man looked away. "He said the shots were another kind of vitamin."
>
> "He never said he was injecting you with the male hormone testosterone?" the prosecutor persisted. "Neither he nor Herr Gläser ever mentioned Oral-Turinabol or Depot-Turinabol," Christiane said firmly. "Did you take these drugs voluntarily?" the prosecutor asked in a kindly tone. "I was fifteen years old when the pills started," she replied, beginning to lose her composure. "The training motto at the pool was, 'You eat the pills, or you die.' It was forbidden to refuse."

As her testimony ended, Knacke-Sommer pointed at the two defendants and shouted, "They destroyed my body and my mind!" Then she rose and threw her Olympic medal to the floor.

Anabolic steroids have been used to enhance athletic performance since the early sixties, when an American physician gave the drugs to three weight lifters, who promptly jumped from mediocrity to world records. But no one ever took the use of illegal drugs quite so far as the East Germans. In a military hospital outside the former East Berlin, in 1991, investigators discovered a ten-volume archive meticulously detailing every national athletic achievement from the mid-sixties to the fall of the Berlin Wall, each entry annotated with the name of the drug and the dosage given to the athlete. An average teen-age girl naturally produces somewhere around half a milligram of testosterone a day. The East German sports authorities routinely prescribed steroids to young adolescent girls in doses of up to thirty-five milligrams a day. As the investigation progressed, former female athletes, who still had masculinized physiques and voices, came forward with tales of deformed babies, inexplicable tumors, liver dysfunction, internal bleeding, and depression. German prosecutors handed down hundreds of indictments of former coaches, doctors, and sports officials, and won numerous convictions. It was the kind of spectacle that one would have thought would shock the sporting world. Yet it didn't. In a measure of how much the use of drugs in competitive sports has changed in the past quarter century, the trials caused barely a ripple.

Today, coaches no longer have to coerce athletes into taking drugs. Athletes take them willingly. The drugs themselves are used in smaller doses and in creative combinations, leaving few telltale physical signs, and drug testers concede that it is virtually impossible to catch all the cheaters, or even, at times, to do much more than guess when cheating is taking place. Among the athletes, meanwhile, there is growing uncertainty about what exactly is wrong with doping. When the cyclist Lance Armstrong asserted last year, after his second consecutive Tour de France victory, that he was drug-free, some doubters wondered whether he was lying, and others simply assumed he was, and wondered why he had to. The moral clarity of the East German scandal—with its coercive coaches, damaged athletes, and corrupted competitions—has given way to shades of gray. In today's climate, the most telling moment of the East German scandal was not Knacke-Sommer's outburst. It was when one of the system's former top officials, at the beginning of his trial, shrugged and quoted Brecht: "Competitive sport begins where healthy sport ends."



"Only careless and stupid people ever get caught in drug tests," one steroid expert says.

GUY BILLOUT

Perhaps the best example of how murky the drug issue has become is the case of Ben Johnson, the Canadian sprinter who won the one hundred metres at the Seoul Olympics, in 1988. Johnson set a new world record, then failed a post-race drug test and was promptly stripped of his gold medal and suspended from international competition. No athlete of Johnson's calibre has ever been exposed so dramatically, but his disgrace was not quite the victory for clean competition that it appeared to be.

Johnson was part of a group of world-class sprinters based in Toronto in the nineteen-seventies and eighties and trained by a brilliant coach named Charlie Francis. Francis was driven and ambitious, eager to give his athletes the same opportunities as their competitors from the United States and Eastern Europe, and in 1979 he began discussing steroids with one of his prize sprinters, Angella Taylor. Francis felt that Taylor had the potential that year to run the two hundred metres in close to 22.90 seconds, a time that would put her within striking distance of the two best sprinters in the world, Evelyn Ashford, of the United States, and Marita Koch, of East Germany. But, seemingly out of nowhere, Ashford suddenly improved her two-hundred-metre time by six-tenths of a second. Then Koch ran what Francis calls, in his autobiography, "Speed Trap," a "science fictional" 21.71. In the sprints, individual improvements are usually measured in hundredths of a second; athletes, once they have reached their early twenties, typically improve their performance in small, steady increments, as experience and strength increase. But these were quantum leaps, and to Francis the explanation was obvious. "Angella wasn't losing ground because of a talent gap," he writes; "she was losing because of a drug gap, and it was widening by the day." (In the case of Koch, at least, he was right. In the East German archives, investigators found a letter from Koch to the director of research at V.E.B. Jenapharm, an East German pharmaceutical house, in which she complained, "My drugs were not as potent as the ones that were given to my opponent Bärbel Eckert, who kept beating me." In East Germany, Ungerleider writes, this particular complaint was known as "dope-envy.") Later, Francis says, he was confronted at a track meet by Brian Oldfield, then one of the world's best shot-putters:

> "When are you going to start getting serious?" he demanded. "When are you going to tell your guys the facts of life?" I asked him how he could tell they weren't already using steroids. He replied that the muscle density just wasn't there. "Your guys will never be able to compete against the Americans—their careers will be over," he persisted.

Among world-class athletes, the lure of steroids is not that they magically transform performance—no drug can do that—but that they make it possible to train harder. An aging baseball star, for instance, may realize that what he needs to hit a lot more home runs is to double the intensity of his weight training. Ordinarily, this might actually hurt his performance. "When you're under that kind of physical stress," Charles Yesalis, an epidemiologist at Pennsylvania State University, says, "your body releases corticosteroids, and when your body starts making those hormones at inappropriate times it blocks testosterone. And instead of being anabolic—instead of building muscle—corticosteroids are catabolic. They break down muscle. That's clearly something an athlete doesn't want." Taking steroids counteracts the impact of corticosteroids and helps the body bounce back faster. If that home-run hitter was taking testosterone or an anabolic steroid, he'd have a better chance of handling the extra weight training.

It was this extra training that Francis

and his sprinters felt they needed to reach the top. Angella Taylor was the first to start taking steroids. Ben Johnson followed in 1981, when he was twenty years old, beginning with a daily dose of five milligrams of the steroid Dianabol, in three-week on-and-off cycles. Over time, that protocol grew more complex. In 1984, Taylor visited a Los Angeles doctor, Robert Kerr, who was famous for his willingness to provide athletes with pharmacological assistance. He suggested that the Canadians use human growth hormone, the pituitary extract that promotes lean muscle and that had become, in Francis's words, "the rage in elite track circles." Kerr also recommended three additional substances, all of which were believed to promote the body's production of growth hormone: the amino acids arginine and ornithine and the dopamine precursor L-dopa. "I would later learn," Francis writes, "that one group of American women was using three times as much growth hormone as Kerr had suggested, in addition to 15 milligrams per day of Dianabol, another 15 milligrams of Anavar, large amounts of testosterone, and thyroxine, the synthetic thyroid hormone used by athletes to speed the metabolism and keep people lean." But the Canadians stuck to their initial regimen, making only a few changes: Vitamin B_{12}, a non-steroidal muscle builder called inosine, and occasional shots of testosterone were added; Dianabol was dropped in favor of a newer steroid called Furazabol; and L-dopa, which turned out to cause stiffness, was replaced with the blood-pressure drug Dixarit.

Going into the Seoul Olympics, then, Johnson was a walking pharmacy. But—and this is the great irony of his case—none of the drugs that were part of his formal pharmaceutical protocol resulted in his failed drug test. He had already reaped the benefit of the steroids in intense workouts leading up to the games, and had stopped Furazabol and testosterone long enough in advance that all traces of both supplements should have disappeared from his system by the time of his race—a process he sped up by taking the diuretic Moduret. Human growth hormone wasn't—and still isn't—detectable by a drug test, and arginine, ornithine, and Dixarit were legal. Johnson should have been clean. The most striking (and unintentionally hilarious) moment in "Speed Trap" comes when Francis describes his bewilderment at being informed that his star runner had failed a drug test—for the anabolic steroid stanozolol. "I was floored," Francis writes:

> To my knowledge, Ben had never injected stanozolol. He occasionally used Winstrol, an oral version of the drug, but for no more than a few days at a time, since it tended to make him stiff. He'd always discontinued the tablets at least six weeks before a meet, well beyond the accepted "clearance time." . . . After seven years of using steroids, Ben knew what he was doing. It was inconceivable to me that he might take stanozolol on his own and jeopardize the most important race of his life.

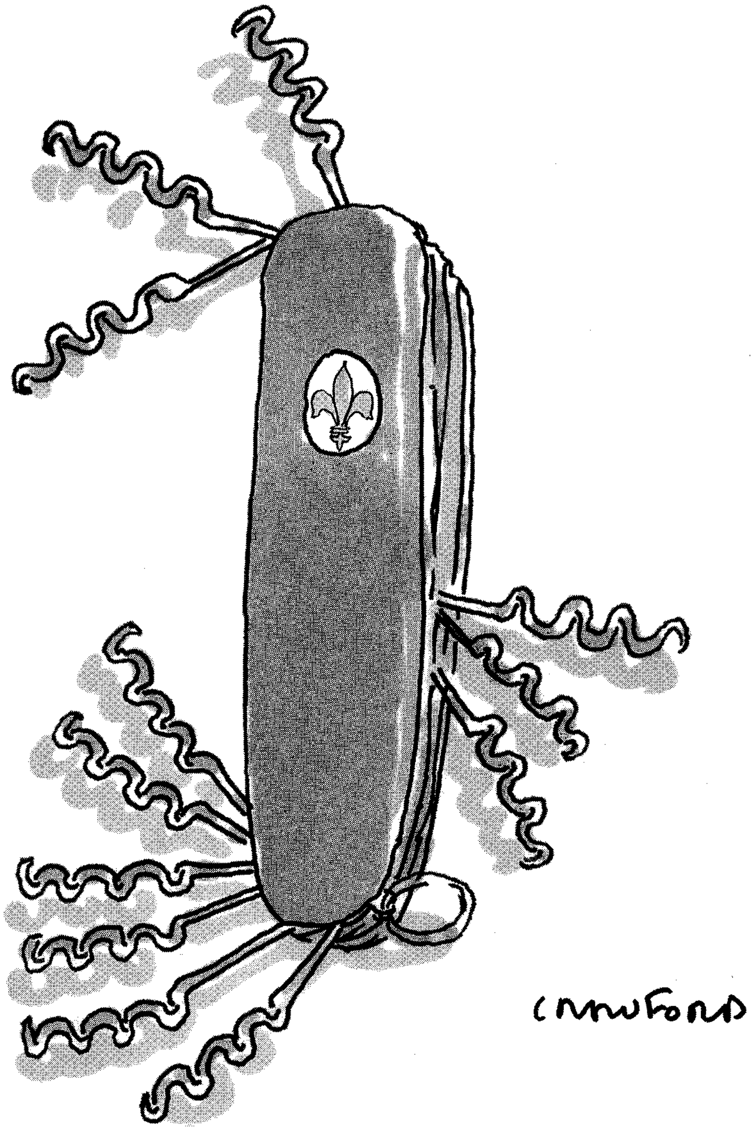
Francis suggests that Johnson's urine sample might have been deliberately contaminated by a rival, a charge that is less preposterous than it sounds. Documents from the East German archive show, for example, that in international competitions security was so lax that urine samples were sometimes switched, stolen from a "clean" athlete, or simply "borrowed" from a noncompetitor. "The pure urine would either be infused by a catheter into the competitor's bladder (a rather painful procedure) or be held in condoms until it was time to give a specimen to the drug control lab," Ungerleider writes. (The top East German sports official Manfred Höppner was once in charge of urine samples at an international weight-lifting competition. When he realized that several of his weight lifters would not pass the test, he broke open the seal of their specimens, poured out the contents, and, Ungerleider notes, "took a nice long leak of pure urine into them.") It is also possible that Johnson's test was simply botched. Two years later, in 1990, track and field's governing body claimed that Butch Reynolds, the world's four-hundred-metre record holder, had tested positive for the steroid nandrolone, and suspended him for two years. It did so despite the fact that half of his urine-sample data had been misplaced, that the testing equipment had failed during analysis of the other half of his sample, and that the lab technician who did the test identified Sample H6 as positive—and Reynolds's sample was numbered H5. Reynolds lost the prime years of his career.

We may never know what really happened with Johnson's assay, and perhaps it doesn't much matter. He *was* a doper. But clearly this was something less than a victory for drug enforcement. Here was a man using human growth hormone, Dixarit, inosine, testosterone, and Furazabol, and the only substance that the testers could find in him was stanozolol—which may have been the only illegal drug that he *hadn't* used. Nor is it encouraging that Johnson was the only prominent athlete caught for drug use in Seoul. It is hard to believe, for instance, that the sprinter Florence Griffith Joyner, the star of the Seoul games, was clean. Before 1988, her best times in the hundred metres and the two hundred metres were, respectively, 10.96 and 21.96. In 1988, a suddenly huskier FloJo ran 10.49 and 21.34, times that no runner since has even come close to equalling. In other words, at the age of twenty-eight—when most athletes are beginning their decline—Griffith Joyner transformed herself in one season from a career-long better-than-average sprinter to the fastest female sprinter in history. Of course, FloJo never failed a drug test. But what does that prove? FloJo went on to make a fortune as a corporate spokeswoman. Johnson's suspension cost him an estimated twenty-five million dollars in lost endorsements. The real lesson of the Seoul Olympics may simply have been that Johnson was a very unlucky man.

The basic problem with drug testing is that testers are always one step behind athletes. It can take years for sports authorities to figure out what drugs athletes are using, and even longer to devise effective means of detecting them. Anabolic steroids weren't banned by the International Olympic Committee until 1975, almost a decade after the East Germans started using them. In 1996, at the Atlanta Olympics, five athletes tested positive for what we now know to be the drug Bromantan, but they weren't suspended, because no one knew at the time what Bromantan was. (It turned out to be a Russian-made psycho-stimulant.) Human growth hormone, meanwhile, has been around for twenty years, and testers still haven't figured out how to detect it.

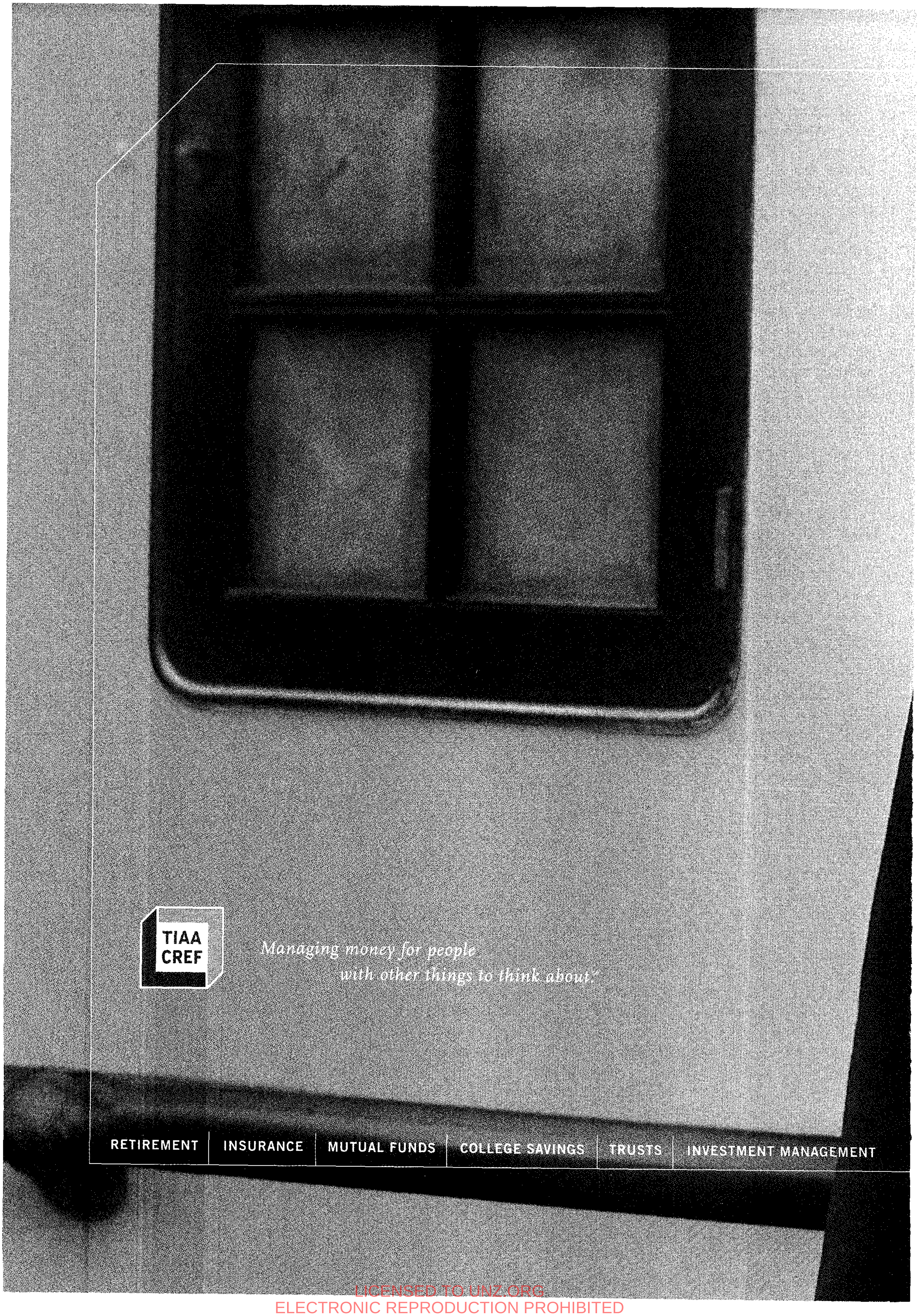
Perhaps the best example of the difficulties of drug testing is testosterone. It has been used by athletes to enhance performance since the fifties, and the International Olympic Committee announced that it would crack down on testosterone supplements in the early nineteen-eighties. This didn't mean that the I.O.C. was going to test for testosterone directly, though, because the testosterone that athletes were getting from a needle or a pill was largely indistinguishable from the testosterone they produce naturally. What was proposed, instead, was to compare the level of testosterone in urine with the level of another hormone, epitestosterone, to determine what's called the T/E ratio. For most people, under normal circumstances, that ratio is 1:1, and so the theory was that if testers found a lot more testosterone than epitestosterone it would be a sign that the athlete was cheating. Since a small number of people have naturally high levels of testosterone, the I.O.C. avoided the risk of falsely accusing anyone by setting the legal limit at 6:1.

Did this stop testosterone use? Not at all. Through much of the eighties and nineties, most sports organizations conducted their drug testing only at major competitions. Athletes taking testosterone would simply do what Johnson did, and taper off their use in the days or weeks prior to those events. So sports authorities began randomly showing up at athletes' houses or training sites and demanding urine samples. To this, dopers responded by taking extra doses of epitestosterone with their testosterone, so their T/E would remain in balance. Testers, in turn, began treating elevated epitestosterone levels as suspicious, too. But that still left athletes with the claim that they were among the few with naturally elevated testosterone. Testers, then, were forced to take multiple urine samples, measuring an athlete's T/E ratio over several weeks. Someone with a naturally elevated T/E ratio will have fairly consistent ratios from week to week. Someone who is doping will have telltale spikes—times immediately after taking shots or pills when the level of the hormone in his blood soars. Did all these precautions mean that cheating stopped? Of course not. Athletes have now switched from injection to transdermal testosterone patches, which administer a continuous low-level dose of the hormone, smoothing over the old, incriminating spikes. The patch has another advantage: once you take it off, your testosterone level will drop rapidly, returning to normal, depending on the dose and the person, in as little as an hour. "It's the peaks that get you caught," says Don Catlin, who runs the U.C.L.A. Olympic Analytical Laboratory. "If you took a pill this morning and an unannounced test comes this afternoon, you'd better have a bottle of epitestosterone handy. But, if you are on the patch and you know your own pharmacokinetics, all you have to do is pull it off." In other words, if you know how long it takes for you to get back under the legal limit and successfully stall the test for that period, you can probably pass the test. And if you don't want to take that chance, you can just keep your testosterone below 6:1, which, by the way, still provides a whopping performance benefit. "The bottom line is that only careless and stupid people ever get caught in drug tests," Charles Yesalis says. "The élite athletes can hire top medical and scientific people to make sure nothing bad happens, and you can't catch them."



FRENCH ARMY KNIFE

But here is where the doping issue starts to get complicated, for there's a case to be made that what looks like failure really isn't—that regulating aggressive doping, the way the 6:1 standard does, is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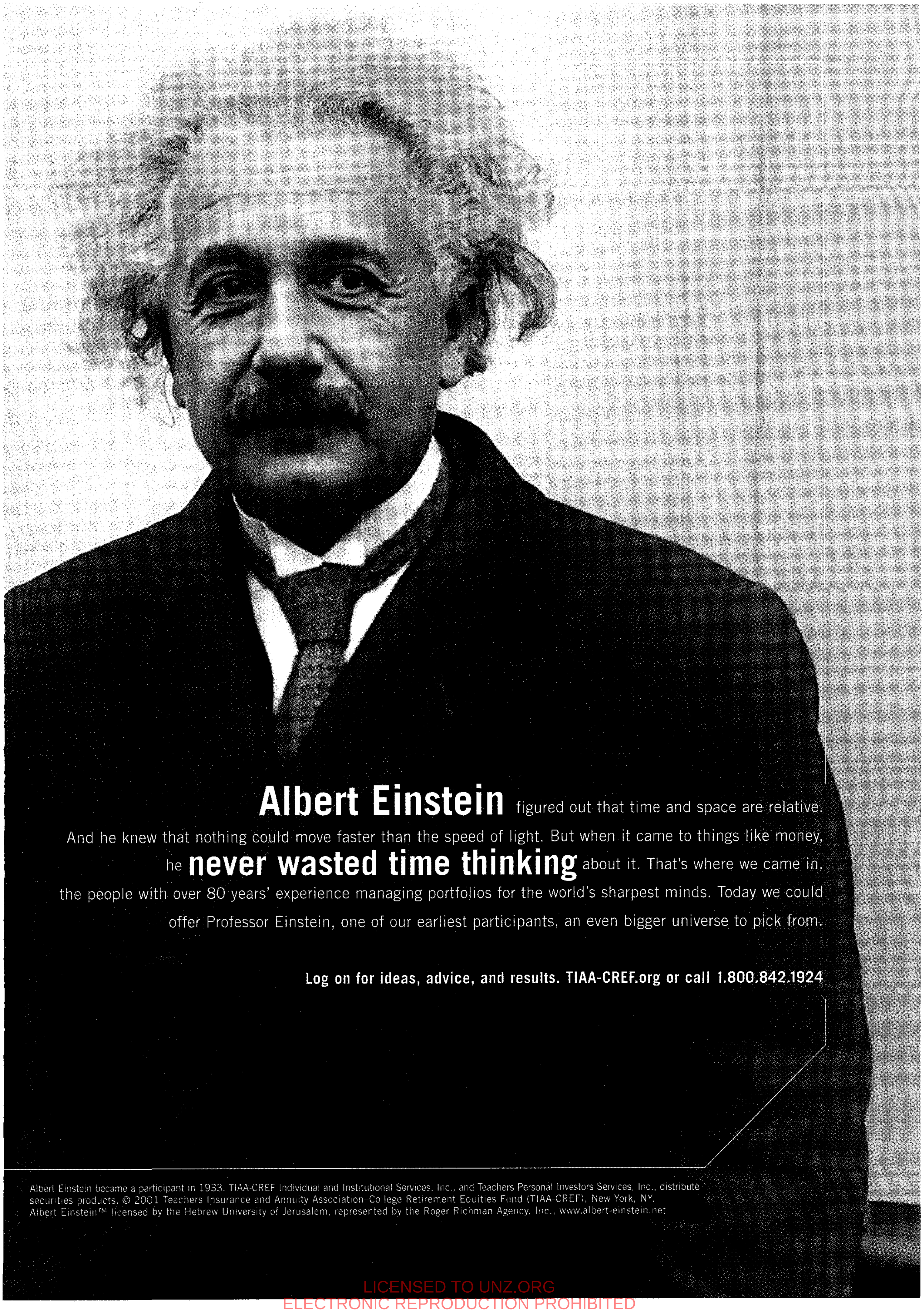

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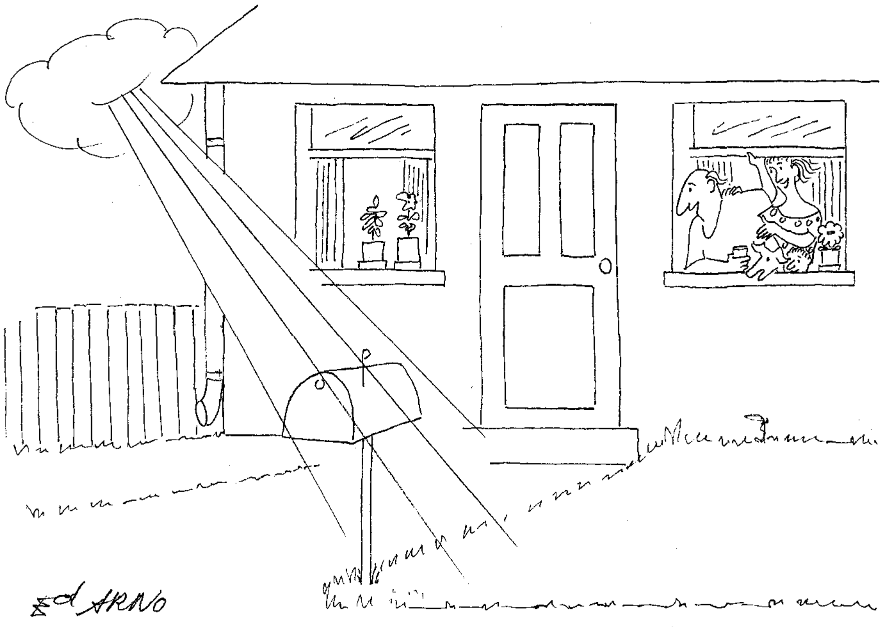
a better idea than trying to prohibit drug use. Take the example of erythropoietin, or EPO. EPO is a hormone released by your kidneys that stimulates the production of red blood cells, the body's oxygen carriers. A man-made version of the hormone is given to those with suppressed red-blood-cell counts, like patients undergoing kidney dialysis or chemotherapy. But over the past decade it has also become the drug of choice for endurance athletes, because its ability to increase the amount of oxygen that the blood can carry to the muscles has the effect of postponing fatigue. "The studies that have attempted to estimate EPO's importance say it's worth about a three-, four-, or five-per-cent advantage, which is huge," Catlin says. EPO also has the advantage of being a copy of a naturally occurring substance, so it's very hard to tell if someone has been injecting it. (A cynic would say that this had something to do with the spate of remarkable times in endurance races during that period.)

So how should we test for EPO? One approach, which was used in the late nineties by the International Cycling Union, is a test much like the T/E ratio for testosterone. The percentage of your total blood volume which is taken up by red blood cells is known as your hematocrit. The average adult male has a hematocrit of between thirty-eight and forty-four per cent. Since 1995, the cycling authorities have declared that any rider who had a hematocrit above fifty per cent would be suspended—a deliberately generous standard (like the T/E ratio) meant to avoid falsely accusing someone with a naturally high hematocrit. The hematocrit rule also had the benefit of protecting athletes' health. If you take too much EPO, the profusion of red blood cells makes the blood sluggish and heavy, placing enormous stress on the heart. In the late eighties, at least fifteen professional cyclists died from suspected EPO overdoses. A fifty-per-cent hematocrit limit is below the point at which EPO becomes dangerous.

But, like the T/E standard, the hematocrit standard had a perverse effect: it set the legal limit so high that it actually encouraged cyclists to titrate their drug use up to the legal limit. After all, if you are riding for three weeks through the mountains of France and Spain, there's a big difference between a hematocrit of forty-four per cent and one of 49.9 per cent. This is why Lance Armstrong faced so many hostile questions about EPO from the European press—and why eyebrows were raised at his five-year relationship with an Italian doctor who was thought to be an expert on performance-enhancing drugs. If Armstrong had, say, a hematocrit of forty-four per cent, the thinking went, why *wouldn't* he have raised it to 49.9, particularly since the rules (at least, in 2000) implicitly allowed him to do so. And, if he didn't, how on earth did he win?

The problems with hematocrit testing have inspired a second strategy, which was used on a limited basis at the Sydney Olympics and this summer's World Track and Field Championships. This test measures a number of physiological markers of EPO use, including the presence of reticulocytes, which are the immature red blood cells produced in large numbers by EPO injections. If you have a lot more reticulocytes than normal, then there's a good chance you've used EPO recently. The blood work is followed by a confirmatory urinalysis. The test has its weaknesses. It's really only useful in picking up EPO used in the previous week or so, whereas the benefits of taking the substance persist for a month. But there's no question that, if random EPO testing were done aggressively in the weeks leading to a major competition, it would substantially reduce cheating.

On paper, this second strategy sounds like a better system. But there's a perverse effect here as well. By discouraging EPO use, the test is simply pushing savvy athletes toward synthetic compounds called hemoglobin-based oxygen carriers, which serve much the same purpose as EPO but for which there is no test at the moment. "I recently read off a list of these new blood-oxygen expanders to a group of toxicologists, and none had heard of any of them," Yesalis says. "That's how fast things are moving." The attempt to prevent EPO use actually promotes inequity: it gives an enormous advantage to those athletes with the means to keep up with the next wave of pharmacology. By contrast, the hematocrit limit, though more permissive, creates a kind of pharmaceutical parity. The same is true of the T/E limit. At the 1986 world swimming championships, the East German Kristin Otto set a world record in the hundred-metre freestyle, with an extraordinary display of power in the final leg of the race. According to East German records, on the day of her race Otto had a T/E ratio of 18:1. Testing can prevent that kind of aggressive doping; it can insure no one goes above 6:1. That is a less than perfect outcome, of course, but international sports is not a perfect world. It is a place where Ben Johnson is disgraced and FloJo runs free, where Butch Reynolds is barred for



"My guess is our tax rebate has arrived."

two years and East German coaches pee into cups—and where athletes without access to the cutting edge of medicine are condemned to second place. Since drug testers cannot protect the purity of sport, the very least they can do is to make sure that no athlete can cheat more than any other.

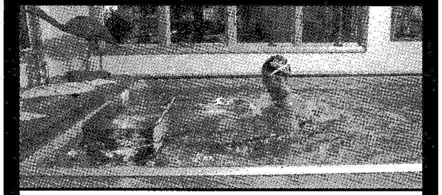
The first man to break the four-minute mile was the Englishman Roger Bannister, on a windswept cinder track at Oxford, nearly fifty years ago. Bannister is in his early seventies now, and one day last summer he returned to the site of his historic race along with the current world-record holder in the mile, Morocco's Hicham El Guerrouj. The two men chatted and compared notes and posed for photographs. "I feel as if I am looking at my mirror image," Bannister said, indicating El Guerrouj's similarly tall, high-waisted frame. It was a polite gesture, an attempt to suggest that he and El Guerrouj were part of the same athletic lineage. But, as both men surely knew, nothing could be further from the truth.

Bannister was a medical student when he broke the four-minute mile in 1954. He did not have time to train every day, and when he did he squeezed in his running on his hour-long midday break at the hospital. He had no coach or trainer or entourage, only a group of running partners who called themselves "the Paddington lunch time club." In a typical workout, they might run ten consecutive quarter miles—ten laps—with perhaps two minutes of recovery between each repetition, then gobble down lunch and hurry back to work. Today, that training session would be considered barely adequate for a high-school miler. A month or so before his historic mile, Bannister took a few days off to go hiking in Scotland. Five days before he broke the four-minute barrier, he stopped running entirely, in order to rest. The day before the race, he slipped and fell on his hip while working in the hospital. Then he ran the most famous race in the history of track and field. Bannister was what runners admiringly call an "animal," a natural.

El Guerrouj, by contrast, trains five hours a day, in two two-and-a-half-hour sessions. He probably has a team of half a dozen people working with him: at the very least, a masseur, a doctor, a coach, an agent, and a nutritionist. He is not in medical school. He does not go hiking in rocky terrain before major track meets. When Bannister told him, last summer, how he had prepared for his four-minute mile, El Guerrouj was stunned. "For me, a rest day is perhaps when I train in the morning and spend the afternoon at the cinema," he said. El Guerrouj certainly has more than his share of natural ability, but his achievements are a reflection of much more than that: of the fact that he is better coached and better prepared than his opponents, that he trains harder and more intelligently, that he has found a way to stay injury free, and that he can recover so quickly from one day of five-hour workouts that he can follow it, the next day, with another five-hour workout.

Of these two paradigms, we have always been much more comfortable with the first: we want the relation between talent and achievement to be transparent, and we worry about the way ability is now so aggressively managed and augmented. Steroids bother us because they violate the honesty of effort: they permit an athlete to train too hard, beyond what seems reasonable. EPO fails the same test. For years, athletes underwent high-altitude training sessions, which had the same effect as EPO—promoting the manufacture of additional red blood cells. This was considered acceptable, while EPO is not, because we like to distinguish between those advantages which are natural or earned and those which come out of a vial.

Even as we assert this distinction on the playing field, though, we defy it in our own lives. We have come to prefer a world where the distractable take Ritalin, the depressed take Prozac, and the unattractive get cosmetic surgery to a world ruled, arbitrarily, by those fortunate few who were born focussed, happy, and beautiful. Cosmetic surgery is not "earned" beauty, but then natural beauty isn't earned, either. One of the principal contributions of the late twentieth century was the moral deregulation of social competition—the insistence that advantages derived from artificial and extraordinary intervention are no less legitimate than the advantages of nature. All that athletes want, for better or worse, is the chance to play by those same rules. ♦



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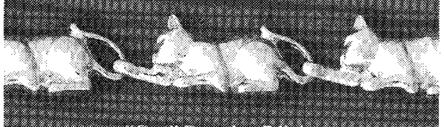

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PROFILES

THE REVOLUTIONARY

The President of Venezuela has a vision, and Washington has a headache.

BY JON LEE ANDERSON

The psychiatric clinic of Dr. Edmundo Chirinos is in a once genteel residential district of Caracas, just down the street from a row of love motels. On the day I visited, several manic-looking men whom I took to be junkies were loitering on the sidewalk outside the entrance. Inside, the waiting room was humid and jungly, full of ferns. There was a five-foot-high waterfall in one corner, and a smaller one in Dr. Chirinos's office. Water streamed over stones and plaster sea horses and plastic shells. "It's meant to be relaxing," Dr. Chirinos said. "Do you find it unsettling?"

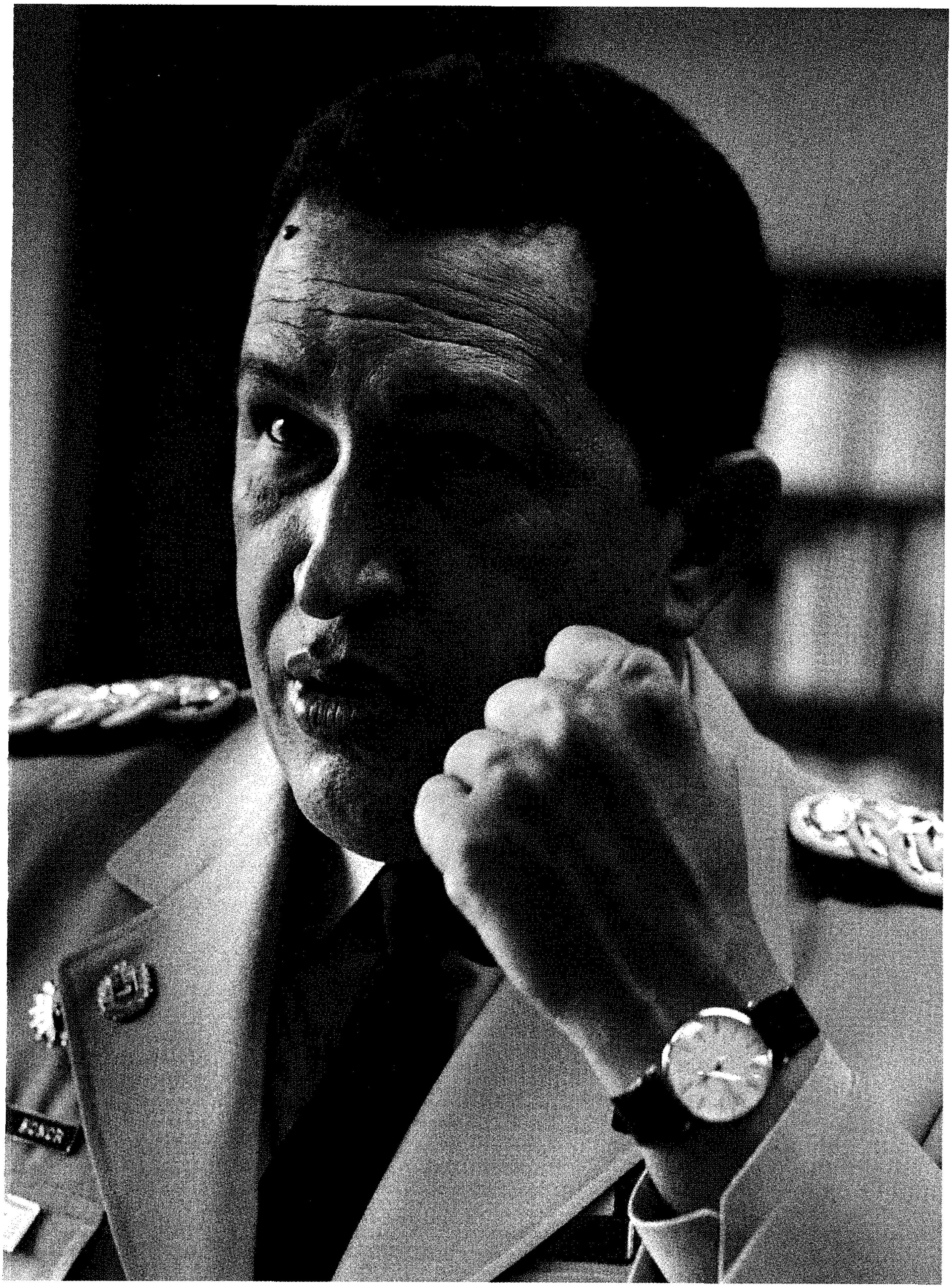
Dr. Chirinos is a small man in his late sixties, with carefully combed thinning hair, impish eyes, and bushy eyebrows. He was wearing a white coat, and he kept his hands clasped on his desk. Dr. Chirinos's patients include many highly placed professional people and political figures in Venezuela, and he told me that he has known all seven of the men who have held the office of President since 1958, when Venezuela became a multiparty democracy. Some of the men were his friends and some of them were his patients. The current President, Hugo Chávez Frías, whom he referred to as Hugo, is both. Dr. Chirinos said that Chávez is the only honest President he has known.

Dr. Chirinos was willing to talk to me about President Chávez and, after thinking it over, he said that perhaps the most discreet way to get at the subject was to use a questionnaire that one of his colleagues had devised. The questionnaire listed fifty personality traits that could be attributed to either Simón Bolívar—El Libertador of Latin America—or Hugo Chávez, or to both men. As Dr. Chirinos read through the list, he emphasized the similarities between Chávez and Bolívar: "He is ill-humored and difficult when he feels frustrated. When least expected, he shows his sense of humor, speaks with familiarity to strangers and friends alike, makes jokes and entertains people. At times he is unjust in his judgments, at other times he is overly tolerant. His character is unpredictable and disconcerting. We can know him in depth only if we join the criticism of his adversaries with the idolatry of his followers and strain them through the colander of logic and objectivity. He prefers to embrace dreams that seem impossible to achieve rather than confronting the harsh realities of life."

When Dr. Chirinos came to trait No. 14—"He has a tendency to be vain"—he stopped. "This is true," he said. "Hugo has traces of narcissism." No. 15: "He displays an unrestrained authoritarianism that predisposes people against him." Chirinos looked up and said, "Yes, this characteristic is very pronounced in Hugo." And so on, through the document. By employing this technique, Chirinos described Hugo Chávez as a hyperkinetic and imprudent man, unpunctual, someone who overreacts to criticism, harbors grudges, is politically astute and manipulative, and possesses tremendous physical stamina, never sleeping more than two or three hours a night. "He is a deeply sensitive man, in private," Chirinos added in a confidential tone. Chávez had wept in his presence on several occasions. As I got up to leave, Chirinos said that he wanted to stress that the President is mentally

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GILLES PERESS

President Hugo Chávez Frías in his office at the Ministry of Defense in Fuerte Tiuna in Caracas. He is used to "generating extreme sentiments in people."



"I ate all the wrong things today."

• •

healthy, completely normal. "Except for his power, he is no different from you or me."

La Casa Natal de Bolívar, the single-story house where Simón Bolívar was born in 1783, is one of the few old buildings remaining in the hectic and dilapidated heart of Caracas. The house looks out on a small plaza where children play and old men sit on benches. It is flanked by other colonial houses, several of which have been turned into party-supply shops specializing in gaudy piñatas. Large yellow papier-mâché Tweety Birds and Disneyish creatures hang from the awnings. Just next door to the Bolívar house is the Bolivarian Society, where historians and aficionados gather for talks and lectures about the great man. On the afternoon I visited the house, which is now a museum, an indigent woman was sprawled out on the curb across the street, breast-feeding a baby. Inside, the fastidious curator, Ramón Valecillo, showed me the white marble bathtub Bolívar had bathed in as a child, the gilded and ornately carved carriage that had belonged to his mother, and the austere room where he was born. The room was haunted, Valecillo said. He himself had seen the ghost. Sometimes horses' hooves could be heard clattering in the cobbled stable yard at the rear of the house.

Almost every town square in Venezuela is named Plaza Bolívar, and in the center there is usually an equestrian statue of El Libertador, who is depicted as a thin man with long sideburns, wearing Napoleonic garb. Street venders in Caracas sell posters of Bolívar and the Virgin Mary alongside those of more recent cult heroes like Che Guevara, Ricky Martin, and Marilyn Manson. Venezuela's national currency is the bolivar. On July 28th, Hugo Chávez celebrated his forty-seventh birthday, just four days after Bolívar's. The milestone brought Chávez to within a few months of the age Bolívar was when he died, in December, 1830, the lonely and repudiated architect of a plan to politically unify all of Latin America, from Mexico to Tierra del Fuego. Bolívar had liberated the present-day states of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia from Spanish rule, but the larger unification effort turned out to be, he said bitterly, like "plowing the sea." A hundred and seventy years later, the Latin-American republics he dreamed of seeing joined are scarcely closer than they were then. In the intervening years, they developed distinct national identities, and nearly all of them have fought bloody territorial wars with one another.

After Hugo Chávez took office, early in 1999, he officially renamed his nation the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. He often quotes Bolívar and invokes his accomplishments, and he says that he wants to fulfill Bolívar's dream of a unified continent. (Which could mean a genuinely revolutionary confederation of states or something akin to the European Community. It's hard to pin Chávez down on this.) He initiated a vast national development program, the Plan Bolívar, to build roads, schools, hospitals, and low-income housing for Venezuela's poor citizens. The new Bolivarism is a response to what Chávez calls "savage neoliberalism," a phrase commonly used in Latin America to refer to the kind of free-market policies that were instituted in Chile in the mid-nineteen-seventies under Augusto Pinochet and in Argentina in the nineteen-nineties under Carlos Saúl Menem. "Neoliberals" favor wage controls, reduced government spending, and the privatization of state-held enterprises. They are against price controls, tariffs, and restrictions on exports and imports. World Bank or International Monetary Fund austerity packages in return for debt renegotiation are central to neoliberal programs. Chávez also says that market-driven arrangements like NAFTA (which when it was instituted in Mexico gave rise, in part, to the Zapatista insurgency) serve mainly to benefit the "global hegemony" of the United States while not adequately addressing Latin America's basic problems.

Few modern Latin-American leaders have been as provocative as Hugo Chávez, or have harbored such grandiose dreams. His loyal constituency is Venezuela's poor, who represent some eighty per cent of the country's twenty-four million people. Chávez's popularity rating is now at fifty-six per cent—less than it once was, but still impressive, especially since poverty, unemployment, and violent crime in Venezuela are at record levels. In the last two and a half years, more than two hundred thousand members of the upper and middle classes have emigrated to the United States, Australia, and Western Europe, taking their money with them. Around eight billion dollars was removed from the country last year. Chávez blames the corruption and negligence of past governments for Venezuela's problems, and he begs for time by quoting Bolívar: "Stand firm and firmer still; have patience, and more patience."

Chávez acts like a man who is on the campaign trail, which, in a sense, he is. He has called, and won, eight referendums. These have allowed him to design a new constitution and to secure an extended term in office for himself. His present mandate expires in 2007, but he can be reëlected for a six-year period. Previously, Venezuela's Presidents were limited to a single, five-year term. He also has a new Supreme Court and a unicameral National Assembly that, since he abolished the old Senate, is stacked with his allies. Chávez has given Venezuela's armed forces an unprecedented role in his government, handing out key posts to senior officers.

Chávez's enemies say that he is becoming a dictatorial *caudillo* like Juan Perón or Fidel Castro. He is Castro's closest ally in the Western Hemisphere. He irked Washington by making a friendly visit to Saddam Hussein a year ago, and by prohibiting U.S. drug-surveillance flights over Venezuela's territory. He opposes the $1.3-billion program, consisting mainly of military aid, to combat the drug trade in neighboring Colombia, both because he thinks the program will lead to a wider war, with more refugees coming into Venezuela, and because he doesn't think the United States should be involved.

Last year, Venezuela was the United States' No. 2 foreign supplier of crude oil and petroleum products. The state oil company, Petróleos de Venezuela, has six refineries in the United States, and it owns Citgo, which has the franchise for nearly fourteen thousand American gas stations. Chávez was instrumental in OPEC's decision to cut back production in 2000, driving up fuel prices and providing twenty-one billion dollars in extra revenues for Venezuela, which is the third-largest oil producer in the organization, after Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Dennis Jett, who was the U.S. Ambassador to Peru from 1996 to 1999, calls Chávez "the greatest threat to democracy in Latin America, with the possible exception of the FARC"—the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia guerrilla group. Earlier this year, U.S. diplomats in Caracas leaked word to several reporters that, under certain unspecified conditions, Washington might green-light a coup against Chávez. But that sort of rhetoric has died down. Despite all his inflammatory language, Chávez has not actually done much to alter Venezuela's economy, and he has encouraged foreign investment and made overtures to American leaders. He has visited the U.S. seven times to meet with businessmen, newspaper editors, and politicians. The elections that brought him to power are generally regarded as having been fair, there are no political prisoners in Venezuela, the press is not curtailed—it lampoons Chávez regularly—and opposition political parties operate freely. It is difficult for the Bush Administration to act against him. "The bottom line is that we don't have a policy in Venezuela," a former diplomat in Bush *père's* government said to me. "Hell, we don't have a policy in Latin America. The policy is not to have a policy, because we don't know how to rein Chávez in without breaking the crockery. And he sort of carries the crockery closet around with him."

Chávez is a mestizo Creole—just as Simón Bolívar was, despite the many portraits that depict him as a white man. Chávez's features are a dark-copper color and as thick as clay; he has protruding, sensuous lips and deep-set eyes under a heavy brow. His hair is black and kinky. He is a burly man of medium height, with a long, hatchet-shaped nose and a massive chin and jaw. Chavez is physically demonstrative and seems to have a nearly photographic memory, flattering people he has met only once by remembering their names and personal details. He is also an inveterate, and not always tactful, prankster. In May, when he met Vladimir Putin in Moscow, he adopted a mock karate stance before shaking Putin's

"The school could certainly use more hall monitors like you, Peterson."

hand. Putin looked startled, but he composed himself and smiled thinly as Chávez swung an imaginary baseball bat. "I hear you have a black belt in karate," Chávez said. "I'm a baseball man myself."

I spoke at length with President Chávez for the first time in his official residence, a hacienda-style mansion that is called La Casona, the Big House. His personal assistant, a young lieutenant named Antonio Morales, led me to a colonnaded wraparound veranda. It was about nine at night, and Chávez was on the lawn, sitting under a large mango tree at a round wooden table. He was wearing sneakers, black jeans, and a long gray collarless tunic shirt with epaulets. A stack of papers, some highlighter pens, and a couple of cell phones were on the table. A servant brought us demitasse cups of espresso, glasses of mango juice, and some grapes and crackers. Chávez is a caffeine addict. One of his assistants told me that when the staff realized he was drinking twenty-six cups of espresso a day they started cutting him off, and have got him down to sixteen.

Chávez lit up a cigarette—not part of his public image. Lieutenant Morales hovered nearby, occasionally going into La Casona and coming back to whisper something to Chávez or to give him a yellow Post-it with a message on it. Most of the time, Chávez ignored these intrusions. He listened attentively to my questions, and appeared to be only slightly uncomfortable when I quoted his harshest critics. "Generating extreme sentiments in people is a consequence of the situation here," he said reflectively, in a manner quite different from the hyperbolic style of his public pronouncements. "I believe, just as Marx and Bolívar did, that men as individuals don't make history; we aren't the defining thing. Bolívar said, 'I am but a weak piece of straw caught up in the revolutionary hurricane.' " Chávez leaned toward me and added, "And a hurricane was unleashed here, you know."

Chávez was referring to the events of 1989, when anti-government riots erupted in the slums of Caracas and spread to the rest of the country. During a three-day frenzy of violence, many hundreds of civilians—nobody knows precisely how many—were killed. The carnage, which is known as El Caracazo, traumatized Venezuelan society. Two parties, the social-democratic Democratic Action and the Christian-democratic COPEI, controlled the government then, as they had since 1958, when the Pact of Punto Fijo was negotiated. *Puntofijismo* was designed to marginalize the left and reduce the ability of minor parties to grow. The system was incredibly corrupt, but it worked as long as the economy flourished, which it did while oil prices remained high. By the late eighties, however, the price of oil had been dropping for a decade and the fiscal mismanagement and outright thievery of successive Venezuelan governments had taken a toll. In February, 1989, President Carlos Andrés Pérez agreed to an economic-reform program requested by the I.M.F. One of its first effects was an increase in public bus fares. This precipitated the riots, and Pérez called out the Army, which opened fire on looters.

"I was just a simple soldier then," President Chávez said to me as we sat under the mango tree at La Casona. "Just a soldier, with a good future, and everything going along well, but then I had to ask, 'What do I do with this rifle, where do I point it?' It was a terrible crisis of conscience. Now that the hurricane is unleashed, what do I do? Do I throw my rifle on the ground and run off, and stop being a soldier, or do I point it at the miserable peasants? Or do I point it against those who have led the people to this situation? My comrades and I took the road of Bolívar, who said, 'Damned be the soldier who turns his weapons against his people.' "

In fact, Chávez had been conspiring since 1982, when a group of junior officers began to discuss a revolutionary junta. They called their group the Movimiento Revolucionario Bolivariano. El Caracazo took Chávez and his fellow-conspirators by surprise, but they saw it as a signal that their moment was approaching. In February, 1992, when most of them had been placed in command of troops at strategic locations around Venezuela, they attempted a coup d'état. Several key garrisons and cities were captured, but Chávez, who was supposed to take the Presidential palace of Miraflores, found his position surrounded by loyalist troops. After several of his soldiers were killed, he decided to surrender, as he tells it, to avert a larger bloodbath. (Seventeen people died during the revolt, including several civilians.) Chávez was taken into custody, and a few hours later the military high command allowed him to speak on national television and attempt to persuade his fellow-rebels to lay down their arms. Chávez's appearance, which lasted thirty-two seconds, was broadcast live.

Wearing his uniform and his paratrooper's red beret, Chávez spoke calmly, praising the rebels for their courage. "Comrades, the objectives we set for ourselves have not been possible to achieve now"—*por ahora*—"but new possibilities will arise again, and the country will be able to move forward to a better future. . . . I alone take responsibility for this Bolivarian military uprising." The words "*por ahora*" were lost on no one, and at that moment Chávez became a national hero. The rebellion was over, and he and the other officers were court-martialled. Chávez was sent to Yare prison, about thirty-five miles from Caracas.

Yare is an awful place. The worst inmates are left to their own devices in two dirty-white, bullet-pocked blocks at the rear of the prison grounds, where black curtains of excrement from broken toilets slide down the walls and the ground is carpeted with an oleaginous mass of raw sewage and suppurating garbage. In the jagged open spaces where the bars on windows have been wrenched out, shirtless prisoners perch like vigilant crows. I visited Yare on a hot, breezeless day, when the prison's stench clung like poison in the air. Inspector Manuel Lugo, a senior Venezuelan corrections official and a former warden of Yare, had offered to show me around, but only from the outside. As we drove along the perimeter of the prison grounds, I saw that the guard towers were also riddled with bullet holes, and

CRICKET CRICKET

When I am alone on a summer night, and
there is a cricket in the house, I always feel
that things could be worse. Maybe it is raining,
and then thunder and lightning are shaking the
house. The power goes out, and I must grope
around in the darkness for a candle. At last
the candle is found, but where are the matches?
I always keep them in that drawer. I knock over
a vase, but it doesn't break. Afraid of what
I might break, I return to my chair and sit
there in the darkness. The lightning is striking
all around the house. Then I remember the cricket,
and I listen for its chirping. Soon, the storm
passes, and the lights come back on. An eerie
green silence fills my home. I am worried that
the cricket may have been struck by some light-
ning of its own.

—*James Tate*

as we drew adjacent to the white blocks Lugo stepped on the gas. "We can't hang around here," he said. "They might shoot at us." He explained that many of Yare's eleven hundred inmates have weapons. "There are only six guards on duty inside at any one time," he said. There was no budget to hire more guards. "It's an impossible situation."

A generation of youths who were born into poverty and who have access to drugs and weapons keep crime levels staggeringly high. Lugo said that of the ninety-odd homicides recorded in Venezuela every weekend, when violent crime peaks, a third are probably extrajudicial executions by policemen. Many cops see no other way to do their job. This was why Lugo was a Chávez supporter. Emergency measures were needed to fix Venezuela's problems, and Chávez was the only person who seemed prepared to tackle the job.

Out of firing range of Yare's cellblocks, Lugo introduced me to Virginia, the secretary of the prison psychologist. Virginia is a tough-looking woman in her late forties, with short-cropped hair dyed an auburn color. She is missing a couple of teeth. Virginia said that she had got to know Chávez well when he was incarcerated in Yare. Every morning, he sat in a chair in the open-air caged yard that had been built specially for him outside his cell. There was a plaster bust of Simón Bolívar there, and he would speak to it. Lugo interrupted to say that he, too, had seen Chávez do this: "He used to turn the head of Bolívar around to face him." Virginia nodded.

Virginia was writing a letter to Chávez. She wanted him to help her rent one of the low-income Plan Bolívar houses being built near Yare. She needed her own place, she explained, because she was estranged from her husband, a National Guardsman, and they were still sharing a home. Virginia attributed the breakup of the marriage to her husband's jealousy over her friendship with Chávez. Virginia laughed raucously when she told me about this. "I don't look at Chávez as a lover," she said. "I admire him because he's got a big enough *bicho*"—penis—"to stand up for the country."

In November, 1992, nine months after the first coup attempt, a group of Air Force officers, including several of Chávez's allies, tried again to overthrow the government. This effort also failed, and it was much bloodier. The Miraflores palace was bombed from the air, and the rebels and the President's loyalists fought in street battles. An armed attempt was made to free Chávez from Yare. It, too, was unsuccessful. In the end, more than a hundred and seventy people died, including scores of civilians. Order was restored, but Venezuela's political system had begun to unravel. In June, 1993, Carlos Andrés Pérez, the President, was impeached by Congress after his own party withdrew its support from him. He was placed under house arrest, pending trial on corruption charges. Later that year, an elderly politician, former President Rafael Caldera, won the Presidency on an independent ticket, with twenty-nine per cent of the vote. The country's two main parties, COPEI and Democratic Action, found themselves out of power for the first time in thirty-five years. In March, 1994, Caldera signed an order freeing Chávez and his fellow-rebels from prison. With his military comrades and some leftist civilian parties as coalition partners, Chávez launched a new party, which he called the Movimiento Quinta Republica (Fifth Republic Movement). In December of 1998, he was elected President with fifty-six per cent of the vote.

During that first evening on the lawn at La Casona, Chávez's wife, Marisabel, an attractive, fair-skinned blonde of thirty-six dressed in sweatpants and a T-shirt, wandered across the lawn to where we sat. She was accompanied by Rosinés, their three-year-old daughter, a pudgy girl with tousled brown hair. Rosinés tumbled up to her father and began making funny faces, looking for attention. Chávez swept her into his arms, and sang a song to her. His wife stood a short distance away, watching them. She was talking into a cell phone, and after a few minutes she walked over and told Chávez that she had learned that her father, who had undergone open-heart surgery three nights before, had pneumonia. She was worried about him. Chávez muttered something in response, but he seemed distracted. Just then, Morales handed him more Post-its with notes on them. While he and Morales conferred, Marisabel and I chatted. Then she went back to the house with Rosinés. In a magazine interview published a few weeks earlier, Marisabel had said that being the President's wife was difficult and lonely. In the photograph on the cover of the magazine, she was crying.

As she has told the story, Marisabel

Chávez draws large crowds of enthusiastic people, many of them from the eighty per cent of the population that is poor. His admire

wear red paratrooper's berets like his and try to hand him letters explaining why they need his help.

met Chávez late in 1996, when she was working as a social columnist in the city of Barquisimeto and he was campaigning there. Marisabel pressed a note into his hand. They were soon having a love affair, and Marisabel became pregnant with Rosinés. Chávez and Marisabel were married in a private ceremony with family and friends in December, 1997, when Rosinés was three months old. Marisabel has a young son from a previous relationship, and Chávez has three children—two daughters and a son—with his first wife, a woman from his home town in the rural state of Barinas, whom he divorced soon after he got out of prison. Chávez's detractors speculate that once he decided to run for the Presidency he realized that he needed a more glamorous wife. The blue-eyed, blond-haired Marisabel seemed better suited to be First Lady, although shortly after the 1998 Presidential elections she was hospitalized for stress.

“The truth is, Hugo has terrible problems in his marriage,” one of Chávez's friends told me. He said that he worried about Chávez's emotional well-being. He had “communication difficulties” with his three older children. “The two girls resent him for leaving their mother, and he is also having problems with his son.” As a short-term solution, he explained, Chávez had sent them to Cuba to study, where they could be looked after by his friend Fidel.

I remembered Dr. Chirinos's remarks about Chávez's sensitivity and his tendency to weep, and I asked the President if he shared Bolívar's tragic view of life. Chávez speaks often of a willingness to die in the service of his country, and there has been some speculation that he has a martyr complex. I had thought about that a few days earlier, during an official wreath-laying ceremony at Bolívar's tomb. Chávez was there with the Presidents of Mexico and Colombia, both of whom were wearing bullet-proof vests. Chávez was not, and I asked him about it. “I never wear one,” he said. This drives his security people crazy, and Castro has also warned him, he said, “thousands of times,” to take better care of himself. “It is possible I have something of this . . . tragic sense of life,” he acknowledged. He recalled that on the eve of the 1992 rebellion he had said goodbye to his wife and three children, and led his soldiers out of their barracks. He was the last to leave. After locking the big front gate, he threw away the key. “I realized at that moment that I was saying goodbye to life,” Chávez said. “So it is possible that one has been a bit . . . imbued with that . . . ever since, no?” He told me, a little ruefully, that Castro had repeated his concerns for Chávez's safety during a speech before the Venezuelan National Assembly. “Fidel said—and I don't want to believe that this is true—‘Look after this man for me, because without this man this revolution will be over immediately.’ ” Chávez laughed. “Since then, wherever I go, people on the street come up to me and say, ‘*Cuídate*’ ”—“Take care of yourself.”

MEET THE AUTHOR
Lorenz

“As long as there's just the two of us, would you mind looking at my book?”

Venezuela is nearly twice the size of Spain—three hundred and fifty thousand square miles. It extends from South America's Caribbean coast southward into the Amazon Basin, where it is linked to Brazil by a single road through the jungle. Colombia and the Andean mountains lie to the west, and to the east is the tiny former British colony of Guyana. A sizable portion of Guyanese territory has been claimed by Venezuela on and off since the early nineteenth century; maps refer to it as a “disputed zone.” Most of Venezuela's heartland is occupied by immense llanos, the tropical floodplains that feed the headwaters of the Orinoco River and are virtually uninhabited except for a few indigenous communities, some dismal agricultural towns, and gigantic cattle ranches.

More than eighty per cent of Venezuelans live in a string of cities near the Caribbean coast, and mostly around Caracas, which has a population of five million. There are only a few traces of the small place that Caracas was less than fifty years ago. Parrots fly overhead, squawking, just before sunset, and here and there, amid the welter of red brick condominiums that are replacing the old suburban neighborhoods, are a few old villas with gardens. *Caraqueños*, as the people of Caracas call themselves, have adopted a distinctly North American approach to living. Those who can afford it drive cars, carry cell phones, eat fast food, and shop in malls. The city has a thriving beach culture and many health clubs. Billboards offer weight-loss programs, liposuction treatments, and weekend escapes to Margarita Island, Curaçao, or one of the other Caribbean beach resorts that lie just offshore.

Brick-and-tin shanties surrounded

by uncollected garbage cover the hillsides at the edges of the city, and indigent people, some of them wild-haired and filthy, and clearly mentally ill, wander in the parks and sometimes along the highways. They camp among rubbish and light campfires on the median strips of major thoroughfares, underneath bridges, and along the edges of the Guaire River, an open-air sewage trough that runs through the heart of Caracas. Wealthy *caraqueños* live in gated communities protected by armed guards, video surveillance cameras, electrified fences, loops of razor wire, and motion sensors. Because of the extreme social divisions, Caracas has become one of the most dangerous cities in Latin America. While I was there, the daily newspaper *TalCual* ran an article dispensing kidnap-survival advice to its readers: "Although it may be difficult, try not to get depressed. The abduction period may be long and anguishing. You may be held incommunicado and spend months without receiving messages from your family. Remember that the most important thing is that you can survive this. Statistics demonstrate that 95% of kidnapped people return alive."

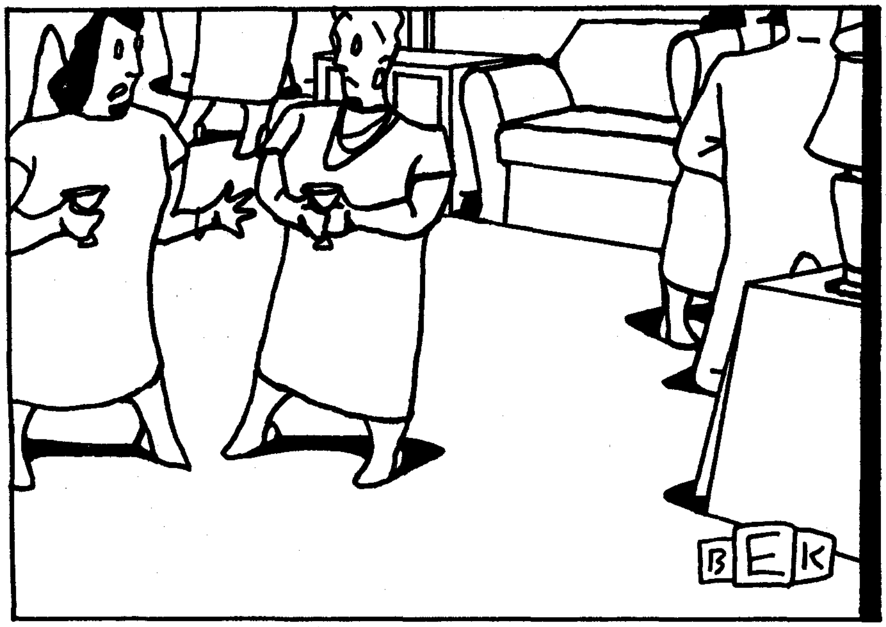
Venezuelans are great believers in miracles. Among the middle class, the best-selling books are predominantly Yankee imports of the New Age and self-help variety. Angels are also very popular; in a mall in Caracas, I saw an exhibition of ornamental effigies of angels, mostly gilded cherubic toddlers with wings and beatific expressions. It had drawn a huge crowd. Venezuelans' fascination with such things has a foundation in spiritism, sorcery, and syncretic faiths. The most dynamic, and widespread, syncretic faith is the cult of María Lionza, a mythical goddess who is depicted as a naked white woman with flowing hair mounted on a tapir. The cult blends elements of Catholicism and Afro-Caribbean religions. There are a variety of lesser deities who represent various categories, or "courts," one of the more powerful of which is the Liberator Court, venerating Simón Bolívar. Yolanda Salas, a cultural sociologist who is a María Lionza expert, says she believes that President Chávez is aware of this phenomenon, and exploits it. "In the minds of ordinary people, Venezuela's patriotic and sacred histories occupy the same space," she said. "There isn't a clear boundary between them, and this is the space Chávez moves in."

Like Fidel, who replaced the bourgeois form of address *señor* with the more egalitarian-seeming *compañero*, Chávez has come up with a new term for Venezuela's citizens. They are *el soberano*—the sovereign. Enthusiastic supporters of Chávez identify themselves also as *chavistas*, or *bolivarianos*, just as those Cubans who still support Castro call themselves *fidelistas* and *revolucionarios*. Chávez has elevated the status of Venezuela's million-odd street children, who used to be called *los niños de la calle*. They are now *niños patrios*, children of the fatherland. Similarly, *damnificados*, the Spanish-language term for people made homeless by natural disasters (such as the catastrophic mud slides that killed between thirty and a hundred thousand people in the Venezuelan state of Vargas in December, 1999), are now *dignificados*, dignified ones.

On April 19th, Venezuela's Declaration of Independence Day, Chávez was scheduled to speak to *el soberano* in Caracas's Plaza Bolívar. He had been away for a few days in Colombia for a meeting with other Latin-American leaders, but had said that he would fly home for the event. Then, at the last minute, he changed his mind and flew directly to Quebec, where the Americas Summit was soon to convene. I had heard the news on the radio early that morning, but I decided to go to the Plaza Bolívar anyway. A thousand or so people were gathered there when I arrived, and I could see that they didn't know of the change in plans. They were jockeying to get as close as possible to the speaker's podium. Groups of supporters who had travelled from towns deep in Venezuela's interior stood in the plaza holding up banners that said things like "Chávez: We Are Peasants from the Forest Reserve of Ticopolo in Barinas State and We Want to Talk with You." I asked one of the bannerholders, a sturdy-looking farmer named Jesús Eduardo Méndez, what it was that he and his friends wanted to talk to Chávez about. "We need better schools for our children," Méndez said. He hastened to add that his presence was not intended as a criticism of President Chávez, who surely had no idea of the situation.

As a military band played patriotic music and dignitaries began assembling on the stage, I moved to the front of the crowd and joined one of the squirming, body-to-body sweat-drenched masses of humanity that engulf Chávez wherever he goes. Most of the people were women clutching envelopes containing letters to Chávez describing their problems. Ana Álvarez, a careworn woman of thirty-four, had come by bus all the way from San Cristóbal, a town on Venezuela's western border with Colombia. A year earlier, she said, she had been unfairly fired from the local social-security office. She had written to Chávez several times about this but had heard nothing back. So now she had come to Caracas, hoping to see him personally to give him a letter and explain her case. Ana had very little money and had to return home the next day. She asked me if I thought Chávez was going to show up soon, and I told her, as gently as I could, that he wouldn't be coming at all. "Are you sure?" she said. I nodded, and she began to weep. I tried to comfort her, and told her that I would probably be seeing Chávez within a few days and, if she wished, I would give him her letter. Ana calmed down and handed me an envelope. Within minutes, I was being accosted by other women who begged me to present their cases to Chávez. They insisted that no one else in the government would or could help them.

This is not an idea that is unique to unsophisticated women from the provinces. Chávez is generally thought to be sincere about his ideas and his plans for the country, but there is a feeling that he is incapable of delivering on them because his government is composed of well-meaning incompetents, outright opportunists, and scoundrels. "Chávez's biggest problem is his lack of follow-through," said Pastor Heydra, a Democratic Action Party representative in the National Assembly. Heydra and I met over lunch at a Caracas restaurant. He was wearing an automatic revolver in his belt, and he put away three triple whiskeys in less than an hour and a



"I can't always be there to kick him when he falls."

half. Despite his world-weary cynicism about the new Bolivarian revolution, he expressed a kind of backhanded compassion for the President. "Chávez is the only revolutionary in this thing," he said. "He's a romantic. Nobody else believes in this shit."

Chávez is a natural showman. During his regular radio and television shows, "Aló, Presidente," which are broadcast live and go on for hours, he scolds his critics, threatens his enemies, sings (with gusto but badly), recites poetry, cracks jokes, and generally hams it up. He tells his viewers, in excruciating detail, what he has done, or is going to do, reminisces about his childhood, quotes John Kenneth Galbraith (he admires Galbraith's theories in "The Affluent Society" about the social inequities of modern capitalism, and he calls himself a *Galbraithiano*), Marx, the Bible, and, most of all, Simón Bolívar. If he has been travelling, Chávez usually points out on a map the places he visited, gives folksy pocket histories of them and extolls their natural beauty, and describes the people he met. After he visited the rural town of Zárate in late March, for instance, "Aló, Presidente" included a video of him assisting military doctors during an operation. (He held a flashlight.) Turning to the audience, Chávez quipped, "You see? Now I can even do surgery!"

This kind of thing plays well with poor Venezuelans, but others find his monologues irritating. "Did you see our Clown Prince last night?" is a typical response. Many white middle-class Venezuelans despise Chávez, and there is a cruel, self-comforting snobbery implicit in their comments about him. For example, "*El peón ha tomado la finca*"—"The peon has taken over the farm." A prominent financier of impeccable Iberian ancestry invited me to lunch at his house, and, as his black servant brought our drinks, he told me, his face stretching with disgust, how "embarrassed" he felt to have *ese mono*—that monkey—as his President. Chávez is isolated from most of the business leaders in Venezuela because, as a former State Department official said to me, "I don't think they know how to talk to him. They've probably never met anybody like him before, except maybe their houseboy."

Last year, Chávez signed a five-year renewable agreement to provide Cuba with a third of its oil needs at heavily discounted prices. In partial repayment, Fidel agreed to dispatch hundreds of Cuban teachers, doctors, and athletic instructors to Venezuela. The first three hundred Cuban sports instructors showed up in April, and Chávez welcomed them in an open-air stadium in Caracas. "The arrival of the Cuban sports instructors is part of a strategy," he said to the crowd there. "Just as Cuba took its own revolutionary path, with its own characteristics, forty years ago, the Bolivarian revolution is taking its first steps today."

A week earlier, I had attended a rally protesting Chávez's education-reform bill, which calls for the expansion of specially funded public schools for impoverished children. Several hundred Cuban teachers are already at work in such schools. The crowd at the rally, about three thousand people, was solidly white and middle-class, except for one dark-skinned man who was selling coffee. They had assembled in an outdoor shopping arcade in front of a McDonald's. As an *antichavista* civic leader spoke from a stage, the demonstrators milled about, took videos of one another, and held up little plastic Venezuelan flags and signs saying "We Want Citizens, Not Militiamen," "Don't Mess with Our Kids," "No to Cubanization," "Education Yes, Indoctrination No," and so forth.

Opposition to Chávez is still disorganized and fragmentary, although there have been protests and strikes by trade unionists who feel that he is trying to dilute their power. When he is challenged, Chávez becomes defensive and calls his critics "oligarchs" and "liars," and accuses them of conspiring to sabotage the government. After a rancher was murdered by a group of peasant land invaders this spring, spokesmen for the Venezuelan cattlemen's association blamed Chávez for inciting the violence with his constant talk about the needs of Venezuela's landless farmers. They warned that if the invasions continued they would defend themselves with guns. Chávez threatened to arrest any ranchers who tried to organize Colombian-style paramilitary vigilante groups. "There is only one legal armed force in Venezuela," he warned in a television address. "And I am its only commander-in-chief. Don't forget that."

Rumors of a move by the armed forces against Chávez are always circulating in Caracas, but they seem to be coming mostly from the Frente Institucional Militar, or F.I.M., an organization of retired Venezuelan military officers. The F.I.M. is led by an ex-general named Fernando Ochoa Antich, a large, formal man in his late fifties. He lives in an apartment that has armed sentries and a sign outside saying that illegally parked cars will have their tires punctured. "There is a growing movement within the opposition to unseat Chávez by means that are neither conventional, electoral, nor democratic," Antich said. "The hope is that this situation will not bring about a military coup, that it will be dealt with using constitutional means." What he meant by "constitutional means," Antich explained, was a scenario in which Chávez voluntarily "resigned" from the Presidency. He acknowledged that he didn't see this as a likely prospect, and added, "I am one of those who believe that eventually the armed forces will be the destabilizing factor of the regime of Hugo Chávez." How would this come about? I asked him. "I don't know," said Antich. "But that is what will happen, because that is what has always happened in Venezuela. We are convinced that a pluralistic and democratic Venezuela cannot exist with Chávez. There are no alternatives possible as long as Chávez is on the stage."

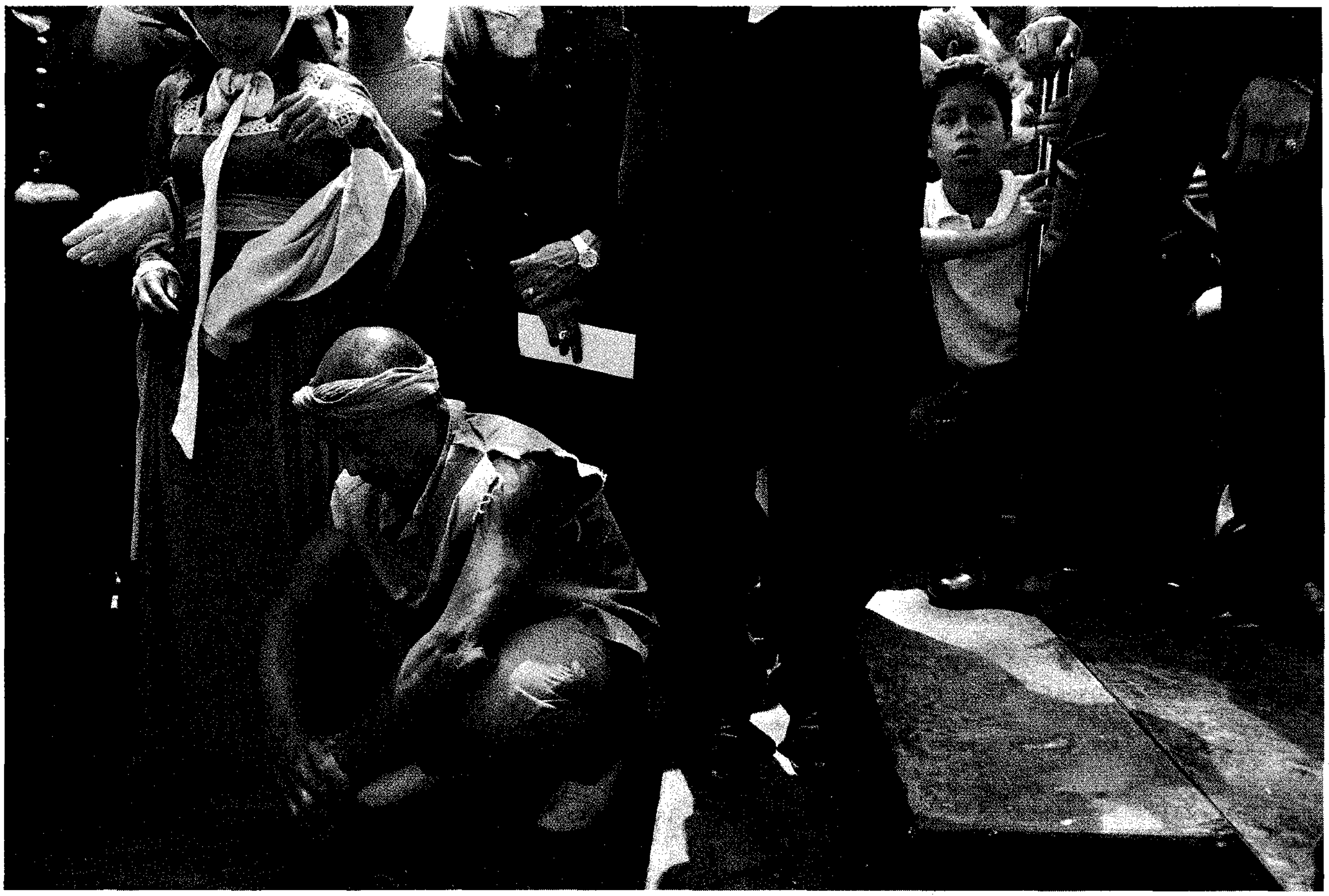
Chávez claims that most members of Venezuela's armed forces are loyal to him, although he acknowledged to me that he knew this was not "a hundred per cent." Early this year, when rumors of a coup grew particularly strong, he reshuffled his top military brass and named his Foreign Minister, José Vicente Rangel, a trusted colleague, as Venezuela's first civilian Defense Minister in seventy years. He then moved the day-to-day running of the government into the armed-forces headquarters of Fuerte Tiuna, on the outskirts of Caracas. He raised salaries across the board, promoted new officers to key positions, and disbursed large sums from Venezuela's extra oil earnings to the military's Plan Bolívar civic-action program.

Before Chávez became President, he was denied entry into the United States because of his role in the attempted coup d'état in 1992, but after he was elected he was granted a visa. He threw the first pitch at a game at Yankee Stadium, pounded the gavel at the New York Stock Exchange, and was received by President Clinton in the White House. John Maisto, who was Clinton's Ambassador in Caracas, advocated supporting Chávez, because he left U.S. business interests in Venezuela intact and encouraged foreign investment. "Watch what Chávez does, not what he says," Maisto advised. The Clinton Administration's policy was to avoid a confrontation in Venezuela that could endanger oil imports and other oil revenues. The Venezuelan state owns the oil and the state oil company controls exports and sales, but exploration and extraction are partially privatized, and foreign companies make hundreds of millions of dollars in Venezuela. "Bill Clinton and Dubya haven't wanted to mess with Chávez," a Bush adviser said to me. "As long as Houston and Big Oil are happy, we're not going to say anything to fuck things up."

Robert Bottome, a Venezuelan economic analyst who publishes a newsletter for subscribers, believes that the price of oil will determine Chávez's policies. Oil accounts for three-quarters of the country's exports. "If oil prices go up, I think that Chávez will Cubanize the economy," he said. "If prices go down, he won't be able to do that. He will have to open up the economy more." But Bottome also worries that Chávez will keep on a leftward path no matter what. "His discourse is straight out of the sixties, and his economic advisers are straight out of the sixties, too. They are people who have been in university ivory towers for the past forty years, talking to each other, and they haven't learned anything about the outside world."

The most extreme leftists with whom Chávez is accused of having some kind of relationship are the Marxist guerrillas of the FARC and the smaller National Liberation Army, E.L.N., in Colombia. Chávez says that Venezuela is neutral in the war that the Colombian Army, various paramilitary organizations, and the guerrillas have been fighting for forty years, and he has offered to mediate in peace negotiations. Last year, however, the Colombian Army seized a cache of assault rifles from a group of guerrillas who were said to have received the arms from Venezuelan Army stocks. A few months later, two high-level FARC representatives were invited to talks in Caracas, and an E.L.N. guerrilla who was wanted in Colombia on hijacking charges turned up in Venezuela, purportedly under official protection. The

"Lassie, get tech support."



Chávez supporters in costume at Venezuela's Declaration of Independence Day celebration in the Plaza Bolívar in Caracas.

leader of the FARC, Manuel Marulanda, denies that there have been direct contacts between his organization and President Chávez, but he says that he would be interested in "working together in the future."

Marulanda said that since Chávez has been in office, relations along the border have improved, but, in fact, Venezuelan cattle ranchers still complain of harassment by Colombian guerrillas who cross over to steal their livestock and extort money from them. Like ranchers whose land has been invaded by organized peasant groups elsewhere in the country, the ranchers on the border say Chávez has done nothing to protect them, and some have resorted to vigilante tactics. In the town of San Cristóbal, I met a man named Otto Ramírez, who claims to be starting up a Colombian-style paramilitary death squad to fight the guerrillas. Ramírez is a small, balding former veterinarian in his late fifties who says that he turned to vigilante tactics two years ago, after guerrillas invaded his ranch and murdered his caretaker. Ramírez, who came out of hiding for our interview, claims that he is in contact with Colombia's paramilitary warlord, Carlos Castaño, whom he greatly admires. He hinted that Castaño had sent him some fighters to "help out." Castaño has an eight-thousand-man army that is known for torturing its victims and decapitating them with machetes. Ramírez boasted that he and his "boys" were active. When I asked him what he meant, Ramírez said, "A few eliminations, mostly low-profile stuff"—of guerrilla messengers and liaisons. He winked and grinned, and said he could say no more. He wasn't worried about being arrested. "When the time is right, I'll cross over to Colombia," he said. He could direct his operations from there.

In El Nula, a small border town a few hours' drive south of San Cristóbal, I met with a woman named Elizabeth (a pseudonym) who works as a liaison for the FARC and who one assumes would be a target for Otto Ramírez's boys. She was an active-duty FARC guerrilla from the age of twelve, but three years ago she was arrested by the Venezuelan Army at a roadblock outside of town. Until then, she had been the FARC's local tax collector and had led a gang of young men who had, at times, roved deep inside Venezuela to carry out their duties. On the day she was captured, Elizabeth was on her own and was unarmed, but she had a balaclava in the car, which was all the evidence the Army needed. "I got caught because I was stupid," she said. After taking her into custody, the Army tortured her. Elizabeth's hip was permanently damaged, and she walks with a limp. A military tribunal sentenced her to twenty-eight years in prison for "military rebellion," but last year she was freed in an amnesty.

"The FARC and Chávez have an understanding," Elizabeth said. Since Chávez came to power, she explained, the FARC had agreed to cease its money-raising operations inside Venezuela proper, but it still exercised power and acted as an arbitrator in problems that cropped up along the porous border. "It's mostly problems over horses and cows and land," she said. Recently, for instance, a wealthy rancher had asked her to have the FARC get rid of some land invaders for him. "He came to us

Anti-Chávez trade unionists and dancing girls at this year's May Day parade.

rather than the Venezuelan Army," Elizabeth said proudly. "He's rich and educated and goes to Miami a lot, but he prefers us; he says he trusts us more." She had gone to the FARC on his behalf, and three fighters came to chase off the land invaders. Several Venezuelans I spoke with in El Nula confirmed Elizabeth's story, and credited the guerrillas with making El Nula a much safer place to live than most other Venezuelan towns. Santos Moncada, who owns a cattle ranch outside town, said that in his opinion the guerrillas were fair, on the whole, in their dispensation of justice. "Because of the authority of the FARC, people can leave their cars unlocked and walk around with jewelry on without worrying about it," he said. "You could never do that in Caracas."

Elizabeth doesn't like the term "narcoguerrillas," which is used to describe the FARC. "I never saw any drugs in my life until I went to prison," she claimed. "The FARC doesn't traffic in drugs; it just makes the traffickers pay a tax to raise funds for the boys, who don't receive salaries, to buy them boots, uniforms, and food." The money for the war effort had to come from somewhere. Elizabeth said she had only one regret, which was that her injury had ruined her chances of being a guerrilla *comandante*. "I believe I was born to be a leader," she said. I asked her if she worried about being arrested again. "There's nothing the Army or the police can do to me," she replied in a sassy way. "All I do is carry messages back and forth, which isn't a crime. And, besides, I have a Presidential pardon." I asked what she thought of President Chávez. "I like him," she said. "He wants equality between the social classes." She paused, and then, a big smile spreading on her face, she added, "He's a guerrilla, that's what he is."

Hugo Chávez was the second of six sons born to Elena Chávez Frías and her husband, Hugo de los Reyes Chávez, poor primary-school teachers in the western state of Barinas. Hugo, Jr., was an avid baseball player and reader of history. He joined the Army as a junior cadet at the age of seventeen and graduated from Venezuela's military academy in 1975 with a degree in military arts and sciences. He was assigned to a battalion that had been ordered to crush an uprising in Barinas led by a neo-Maoist organization, Bandera Roja.

Chávez has said that during the Barinas anti-guerrilla campaign he began to feel sympathy for the people he was fighting and for the revolutionary cause. He says that he and his friends didn't have the least idea of what they were going to do, but in the early eighties they formed the secret Movimiento Revolucionario Bolivariano. It was around this time that Hugo's eldest brother, Adan, a Marxist university professor, introduced him to Douglas Bravo, one of Venezuela's most famous former guerrilla leaders. Adan Chávez was a member of Bravo's Partido de la Revolución Venezolano, which advocated a Marxist revolutionary takeover in Venezuela in an alliance between civilian activists and military officers. Adan Chávez is now his brother's private secretary. He is an elusive figure, but we spoke several times, and once, in an uncharacteristic moment of candor, he said that he had named one of his sons Ernesto, after Che Guevara, whom, he said, he admired greatly.

Hugo Chávez worked with Douglas Bravo until shortly before the 1992 coup-d'état attempt, when they broke off ties. Bravo told me that Chávez had sold out his leftist principles in favor of a purely military coup. President Chávez tells a different story, which is that Bravo broke with him much later on, after he decided to seek power by means of the ballot box instead of the gun. In any case, the break with Bravo is emblematic of Chávez's problems with some leftists in Venezuela, who have qualms about his military background, his pro-business policies, and his friendships with people of varying political philosophies—including, bizarrely, Norberto Ceresole, an Argentine neofascist and Holocaust denier who was asked to leave Venezuela after Chávez became President. "There are people with rhetoric that is even more radical than ours, who are operating on the margins of this process, and who could abort it with their actions," Chávez's Interior Minister, Luis Miquelena, said to me.

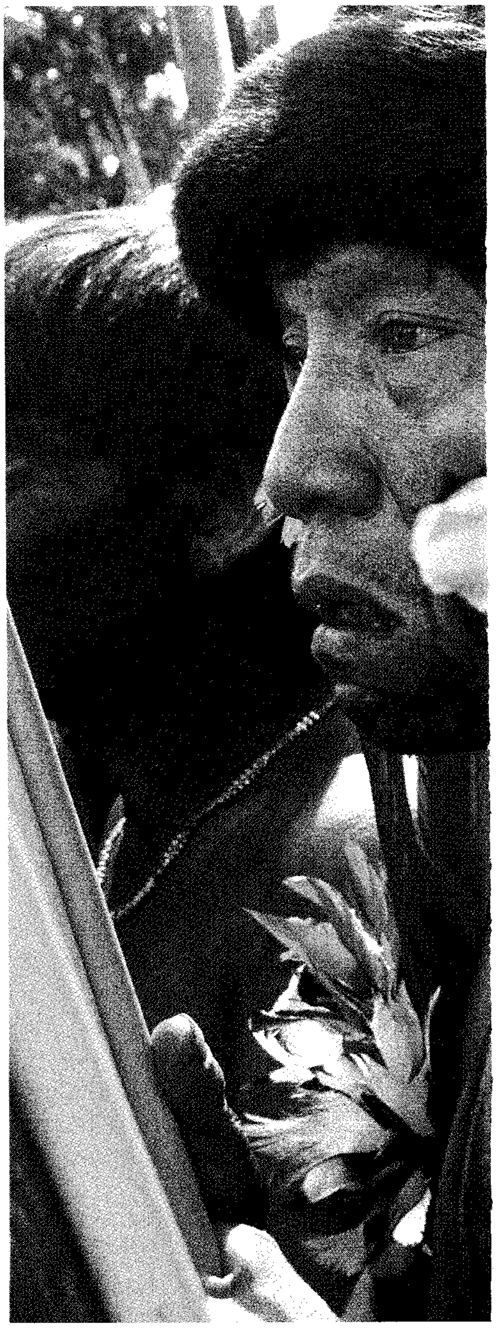
In April, a group of students occupied the administrative offices of the Central University of Venezuela, the largest school in the country. The students complained that the university was run by a "professorial aristocracy." Douglas Bravo was with the protesters the day I visited the campus. Bravo is a short, dapper man in his late sixties. He was conferring with young men wearing Che Guevara T-shirts. One of them, Pavel, an engineering student in his early twenties, explained what they were fighting for. "The university has not fulfilled its social role," he said. "It is divorced from the society around it. It has become a mummy, a sepulchre, and we want each classroom to be linked to the society outside the campus." Bravo explained that the university takeover was an essential step forward in what he called "the interrupted process of the Bolivarian revolution." What happened next depended to a large extent on Chávez. "He allies himself either with the forces of globalization," Bravo said, "or with the masses."

In some of Caracas's worst slum districts, restless leftist militants have formed an armed, quasi-guerrilla underground. So far, they have devoted themselves to "social cleansing" activities, such as executing drug pushers and other miscreants. A *chavista* deputy in the National Assembly, Marelis Pérez Marcano, who is a former guerrilla herself, told me that she worries about the slow pace of change. "My greatest fear is that the revolutionary climate generated by President Chávez will begin to fall away. We need to stimulate the people, to keep the flame of revolution alive." She was helping to organize a network of Fuerzas Bolivarianas, citizens' committees. "With these mechanisms in place," she said, "the revolution will be irreversible. The people are behind Chávez, but if—God forbid—others try to remove him from power by force, the people will be able to go out and defend him."

Luis Enrique Ball Zuloaga, a Venezuelan businessman in his early forties, describes Chávez's political radicalism as an inept continuation of the big-government, free-spending policies of the *puntofijista* governments that preceded him. Carlos Andrés Pérez nationalized the oil business when he was President, in the nineteen-seventies, and unprofitable government-owned industries were bankrolled. "Absolutely everything ended up in the hands of the state," Ball Zuloaga said. "It was practically the Sovietization of Venezuela's economy. And we used to have one of the most open economies in the world. This used to be like Hong Kong!" Ball Zuloaga said that until fairly recently the Van Cleef & Arpels store in New York had a plaque that read "New York, Paris, Caracas." Of course, he added, the Caracas shop has long since closed.

Ball Zuloaga lives in a huge house built by his grandfather in the Spanish Cantabrian style, with stone fasciae and a peaked terra-cotta roof. He went to Choate and studied economics at Carnegie Mellon before returning to Venezuela to help administer the family's businesses—banks and insurance companies. Until two years ago, he was the president of the Venezuelan Confederation of Industrialists. He said that his successor had been trying to make an appointment with Chávez, without success. "I don't know anyone who can get close to him. I would say he is the most isolated leader Venezuela has had in forty years. He thinks like a soldier, and is surrounded by people who supported him either in his coup attempt or in his political campaign." Things cannot continue as they are for much longer, Ball Zuloaga said. "Chávez has two options, either to open up to the private sector or to radicalize further. I believe he will opt for radicalizing. I think Venezuelan society will have to live through disaster before it can go back to being a prosperous and forward-looking country."

Chávez was born in a dirt-floored adobe house in Sabaneta, a little town surrounded by grazing Zebu cattle, royal palms, and mango trees, but his family moved long ago to the city of Barinas, the state capital. In 1998, while

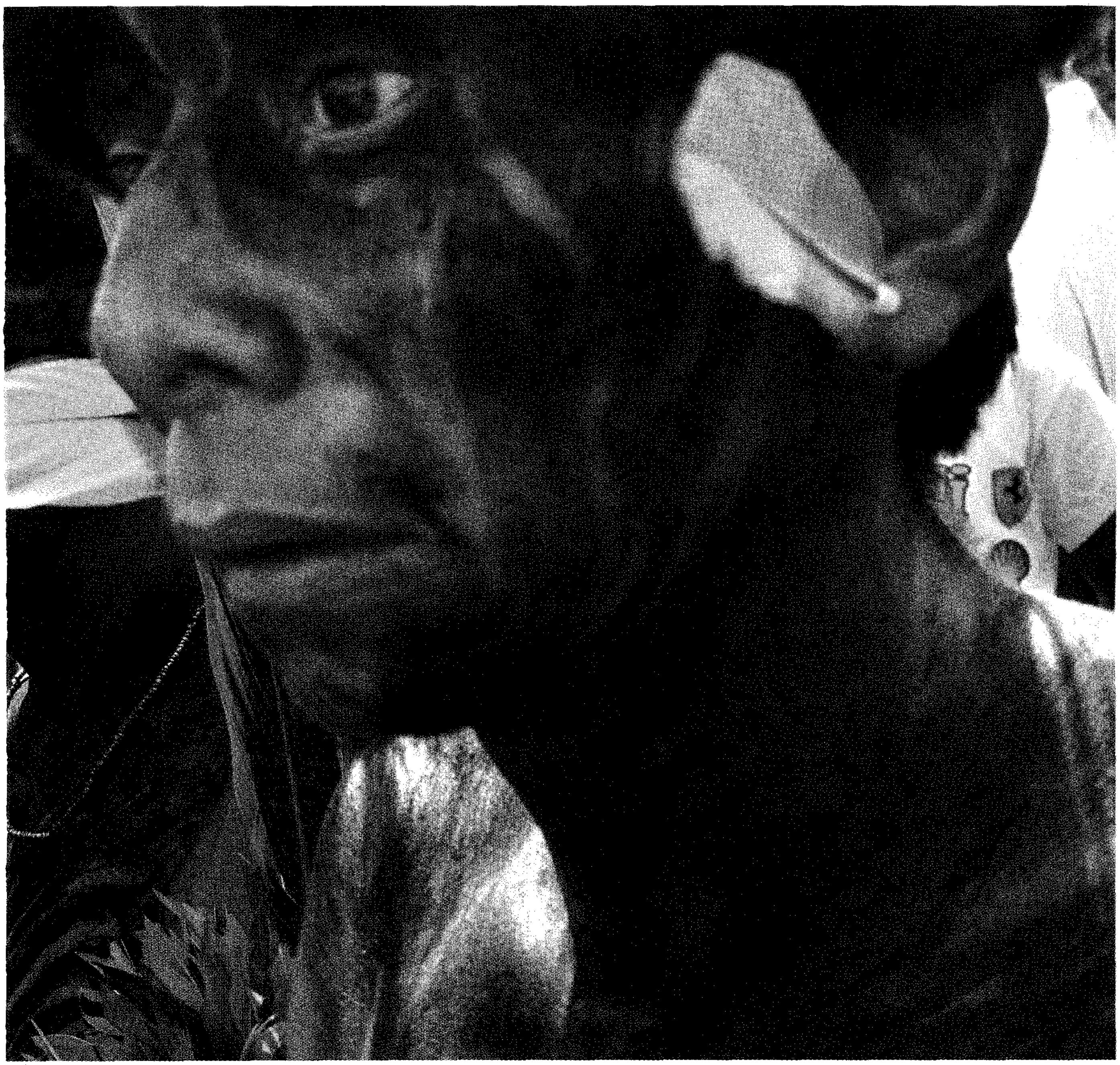


The new Venezuelan constitution includes a

Hugo was running for President, his father campaigned for governor of the state and won. Hugo, Sr., has not been well (he was operated on recently for prostate cancer), and his sons help with the governor's duties. Narciso, a businessman; Argenis, an electrical engineer; Aníbal, an English teacher; and Adelis, a banker, have been characterized as a gang of sticky-fingered petty thieves whose activities have greatly embarrassed Hugo Chávez. He was said to have dispatched Adan to Barinas several times to reprimand them, but when I told the President that I'd like to meet his family he said he thought it was an excellent idea, and he instructed Adan to make the arrangements.

The governor's mansion in Barinas, a smaller version of La Casona, is a rambling house with a colonnaded veranda and a garden filled with shade trees. The governor's office contains a wheezy air-conditioner, a large portrait of Bolívar, and two carved wooden busts—one of Hugo Chávez and one of Christ. On a side table there is a photograph of Hugo's mother, Doña Elena, with Daniel Ortega, the former Nicaraguan Sandinista leader. Ortega has his arm around her. I was entertained first by the youngest Chávez brother, forty-year-old Adelis, a pleasant-looking man with a wide jaw and straight black hair. Adelis was wearing a gray business suit and a pink floral tie with a gold tiepin. He also wore a gold vanity bracelet, a gold ring with a diamond inset, a gold pen in his suit pocket, and a gold lapel pin.

Adelis, who had recently become a corporate vice-president at the Banco Sofitasa, said that he had learned to "immunize" himself from the political gossip that swirled around the family, and especially around his brother the President. But he was indignant, he conceded, about being called a thief, as had happened not long ago, when he bought



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rticle that protects indigenous peoples like the Yanomami, who live in isolated communities on Venezuela's border with Brazil.

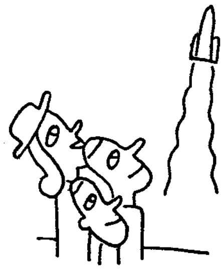
a new house. "I bought it with my own savings, and with credit from a bank, and not the bank I work for," he said. I asked Adelis if he had any political ambitions of his own. He smiled and said no, he was quite content to remain in the private sector for the foreseeable future. He had recently won the state franchise for a major Venezuelan mobile-telephone network. "I had no idea these phone concessions were so lucrative," he said. "It's a really profitable business!"

After Adelis left, Don Hugo and Doña Elena came into the office. The Governor, a gray-haired man with dark skin, appeared to be tired. I could see that Hugo Chávez inherited his skin color from his father, but his full face and thick jaw clearly came from Doña Elena, a small, sturdy woman with fair skin and penetrating eyes. She was dressed in slacks and a floral shirt. Doña Elena did much of the talking. "You know, sometimes I think Hugo has been sent by God to do these things to help his people," she said. "But he is so alone there. I pray that God and the Holy Virgin will take care of him for me, because he has enemies." Don Hugo interrupted to say that he was concerned about "infiltrators and opportunists" within his son's government. He said that he was convinced that if there was a confrontation the Venezuelan people—*el soberano*—would fight to defend the revolution. He and Doña Elena had recently returned from Cuba. It had been their first trip outside of Venezuela, a wonderful experience. They had been treated magnificently by Fidel. Don Hugo had asked his son to send eighty Cuban sports instructors to Barinas. Soon, Don Hugo added, some Cuban doctors would be arriving as well. "The Cubans go wherever they are ordered to go," he said, "because they have been *conscientisized.* The Cubans will help us *conscientisize*"—raise the consciousness of—"the Venezuelans. That's the idea."

A few days later, the President invited me to accompany him on a trip to the interior. Our first stop was Barinas, where Chávez opened a new section of highway. When our helicopters touched down, people broke through the security cordon and swarmed around Chávez, screaming his name and holding up placards and letters addressed to him. Chávez dispensed kisses and handshakes as he made his way slowly toward a speaker's pavilion in a large dirt square. Free refreshments were being handed out in tents. Twenty freshly slaughtered cows were being roasted on spits. Soldiers were standing at attention, together with a couple of hundred men in clean khaki uniforms and tan rubber boots. The men in khaki held picks and shovels as if they were rifles. They belonged to one of Chávez's new volunteer "reservists' battalions," which are made up of former military conscripts. The volunteers are given a small salary, a uniform, and refresher courses in soldiering before being sent out to work on roads, state-owned cattle and sheep ranches, and construction jobs. After reviewing the troops, Chávez spoke about the need for an equitable distribution of land and lauded his audience as "the people who have been suffering, beaten down, and humiliated but are now *dignificados!*" The crowd cheered.

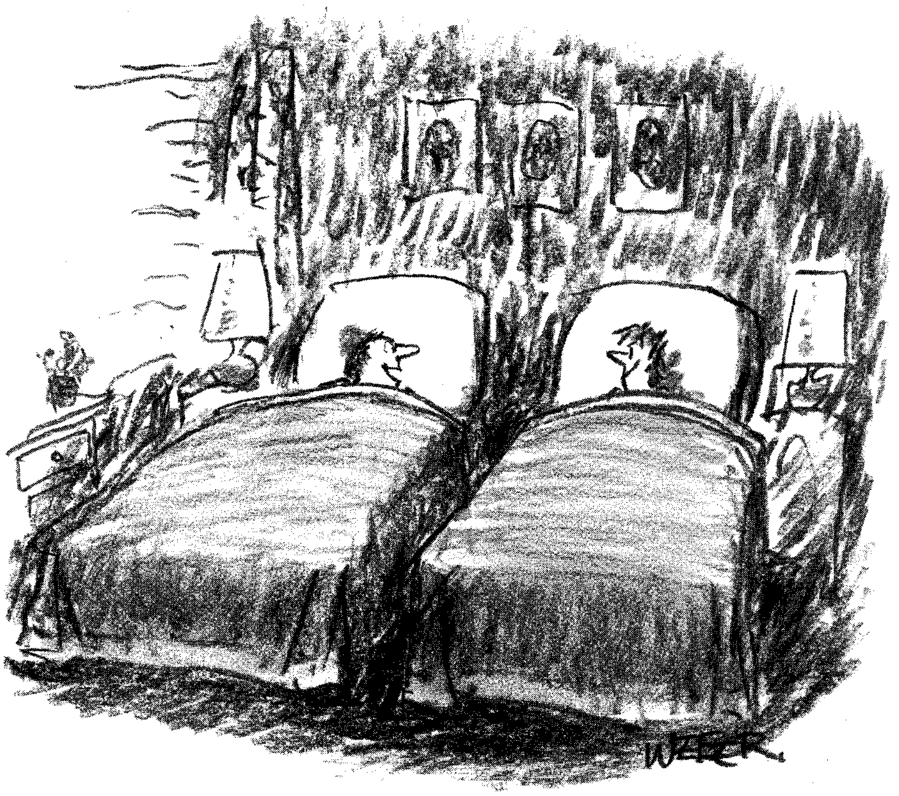
It took Chávez five minutes to walk to his jeep through the press of people, and another fifteen for him to drive out of the square. As the vehicle inched forward, two soldiers standing behind Chávez filled shoulder bags with the letters being shoved at them. I had followed the progress of a man in a wheelchair through the frantic waving gestures of one of his relatives, who was holding up an X-ray in one hand and a placard in the other. It read, "President Chávez: Help me, please, I have a broken spinal column and I need your help." Eventually, the X-ray was passed over the crowd, hand to hand, and made it into one of the bags of Chávez's bodyguards. A great cheer went up. "And they call this a dictatorship," Jorge Giordani, Chávez's Minister for Social Planning, murmured.

It was past midnight when we returned to Caracas, after further riotous stops in Sabaneta, where Chávez inaugurated a Bolivarian computer center, the first of a thousand he wants to open across Venezuela, and in another rural town, Cojedes, where crowds of peasants greeted him with signs begging him to give them land to farm. The next morning, I went to see Jorge Giordani in his office. He is an unusual-looking man, with a large forehead and a very wide face with pale skin and a white beard. He wears glasses that make his blue eyes appear huge. Giordani and Chávez met in the early nineties, when Giordani was a professor of economics and social planning at the Central University of Venezuela and Chávez was in prison. He asked Giordani to become his teacher. "The plan was for Chávez to write a thesis on how to turn his Bolivarian movement into a government," Giordani said. "He never finished the thesis, though. Whenever I ask him about it, he just tells me, 'That's what we are doing now, putting theory into practice.' "



Giordani spoke with me at length about the plans he and Chávez have for Venezuela's revolutionary future. He used the word "utopian" a lot. He showed me maps and charts for a series of "self-sustaining agro-industrial communities" that they were going to build in the interior. The Venezuelan Army had already begun working on the first ones. The communities would eventually become small cities, with populations of up to fifty thousand people. "We want to get rid of the shantytowns, to repopulate the countryside," Giordani said. He conceded that the idea might seem unrealistic. "But in social planning one moves between utopia and reality." Anyway, he added, "this isn't something that is going to happen tomorrow. This is a fifty-year plan."

The next day, at the Maracaibo Country Club, a patch of green lawn surrounded by red-baked wasteland where Chávez was to be picked up and driven to a nearby rest home, two dozen or so peasants had gathered to stare at him through a chain-link fence. The peasants were skinny, with black hair and angular features. Their clothes were frayed and soiled. There was a woman, several men, and eight or nine children. Chávez said hello and asked them if they were Guajiro Indians. Yes, replied the woman. From Colombia?



"New York may have the toughest divorce laws in the nation, but you and I have never shied away from adversity."

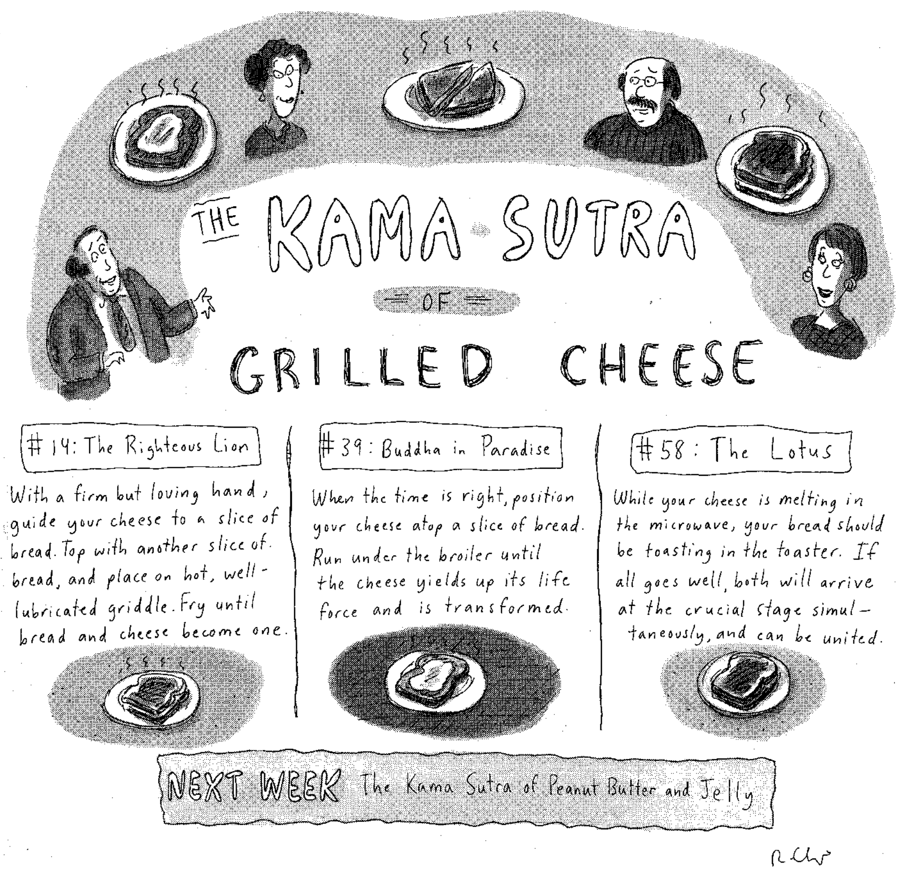
Chávez asked. Yes, she said. Were they *indocumentados*—illegals? Yes. Chávez pulled out his wallet and showed them his own identity card. "Look, here's mine," he said. "Oops, it's expired! Guess that makes me illegal, too!" The Guajiros laughed at this.

"Listen," Chávez said, "we are all brothers here, Colombians and Venezuelans. We are the same people." He touched the children's fingers through the rusty fence and kept up his questions. He asked them how they survived and what they earned. They were sharecroppers on the land, a yucca farm—the woman gestured behind her—that belonged to a retired colonel, and they were given half the harvest in return for their work. They had earned a million bolivares—approximately thirteen hundred dollars—she said, for eight months' work. "A million!" Chávez exclaimed, and did some quick calculations on his fingers. "But that's much less than the legal minimum wage. What is the name of the landowner?" She told him. Turning to one of his aides, Chávez snapped, "Find out about this man. I want details on him. Check out his land titles, too." Chávez asked if the children in the group went to school. The woman said they had been told that since they had no identity papers their children couldn't go to the local school. Chávez asked where the school was and who the administrator was. The woman pointed in the distance.

"Under our new constitution," Chávez said to the Guajiros—and he pulled out a copy of the constitution, a small blue book, which he keeps in his breast pocket—"this book here, everyone in Venezuela has the right to go to school, whether or not they have papers." He told them that they were being exploited. "Do you understand me?" They nodded their heads, and Chávez turned to General Cacerez, the Maracaibo regional Army commander, who stood behind him. "Listen. I want the land tenure around here investigated," he said. "I want them to own their land, to have a school, and a clinic." General Cacerez looked flustered. "*Sí, mi comandante*," he replied. Chávez's aides were scribbling furiously in notebooks, and the Guajiros were wearing disbelieving expressions. The woman who had been doing all the talking said to Chávez, in a dreamy way, "I knew when I saw you that you would come over to us." Chávez entwined her fingers in his through the mesh. "I love you people," he said. She pressed her face against the mesh and replied shyly, "And we love you, too, Chávez." Then, after more instructions to his aides, Chávez took his leave, telling the Guajiros not to worry, he would be back one day soon.

The following morning, Chávez went to La Esmeralda, an outpost in the Amazon jungle at the headwaters of the Orinoco River, an hour and a half from Maracaibo by Presidential jet. La Esmeralda is in a rain forest, at the base of a great massif, one of Venezuela's extraordinary tabletop mountains, called *tepuis*, which are the two-billion-year-old remnants of the mountains of Gondwanaland. La Esmeralda has a Salesian mission, a National Guard barracks, a few tin-and-palm-roof houses, a river dock, and not much else. Some nuns and missionaries, soldiers, civilian officials, and a group of barefoot Indian boys and girls, some wearing grass skirts, whose torsos and legs bore hand-painted designs, waited for Chávez on the airstrip. He had come to La Esmeralda to give a fleet of fibreglass river ambulances with new outboard motors to the area's isolated Indian communities, and to inaugurate an indigenous-people's radio station, which had been set up by the National Guard. Chávez had included a sweeping indigenous-rights bill—Venezuela's first—in the new Bolivarian constitution. As the ceremonies took place, representatives of various Indian communities milled about, awaiting a chance to speak to him.

Suddenly, a group of about thirty Yanomami men appeared on a run from the forest on the far side of the airstrip. The Yanomami are an indigenous people who hunt and fish in a remote part of the jungle that straddles both sides of Venezuela's border with Brazil. They wore loincloths, and their bare torsos and legs were covered in black war paint. Their faces were smeared red, and they brandished spears and axes. They were making yipping sounds and shaking their weapons. About a hundred feet from where Chávez was delivering his


THE KAMA SUTRA OF GRILLED CHEESE
#14: The Righteous Lion
With a firm but loving hand, guide your cheese to a slice of bread. Top with another slice of bread, and place on hot, well-lubricated griddle. Fry until bread and cheese become one.
#39: Buddha in Paradise
When the time is right, position your cheese atop a slice of bread. Run under the broiler until the cheese yields up its life force and is transformed.
#58: The Lotus
While your cheese is melting in the microwave, your bread should be toasting in the toaster. If all goes well, both will arrive at the crucial stage simultaneously, and can be united.
NEXT WEEK The Kama Sutra of Peanut Butter and Jelly

speech, the Yanomami were stopped by security men and some National Guardsmen with rifles. In the middle of the group, a small Yanomami man was shouting in halting, barely intelligible Spanish. He was hyperventilating with excitement. Occasionally, he stopped to gasp for breath, and then continued shouting, in a high, reedy voice. One of Chávez's aides called out a few questions while writing things down on a notepad, but it was a futile exercise; the Yanomami spokesman was not listening. Eventually, I understood that he was issuing a complaint on behalf of several villages that had been excluded from the handout of riverboat ambulances. He concluded furiously, "For this, we are very angry!" He shoved his spear high into the air and yipped. His fellow-warriors followed suit, and began jumping and yipping, too. Then, suddenly, the Yanomami turned around as one and ran back across the airstrip and into the forest.

Chávez had been unaware of the scene with the Yanomami. He was still speechifying, telling the indigenous people gathered in the little crowd that they were the original Venezuelans and that all Venezuelans, whether Indian, black, or white, enjoyed equal rights under the new constitution. As for himself, Chávez told them, he could boast of having all of those bloods. "*Soy blanco, negro, y indio*," he shouted. "Just like the majority of Venezuelans!"

On the return flight to Caracas, Chávez called me into his private compartment. He pulled out his agenda, and proposed that I come to his office in Fuerte Tiuna, the military headquarters, the following morning. I told him about all the letters I had to give him. "Oh, yes, the letters!" he said, and laughed. He explained that he had a special team of assistants who typed up summaries of the letters every night. Every morning, he went over them. "*All* of them?" I asked. "All of them," he assured me. "The ones that seem to merit our attention, I order my people to follow up."

Nearly everything in Venezuela's Bolivarian revolution, it seems, depends upon Hugo Chávez's personal attention. The result is haphazard, anarchic. Those who are lucky enough to catch Chávez's eye—like the Guajiros outside the fence at the Maracaibo Country Club—reap the benefits. Those who don't, like the irate Yanomami warriors, are out of luck.

Chávez's micromanagement of his country's affairs made it difficult to avoid taking responsibility early this summer for the embarrassing incident involving Vladimiro Montesinos Torres, the former head of intelligence in Peru, whose corrupt practices brought down the Fujimori government. For months, Montesinos was said to be hiding in Venezuela, and there were reports that he had had plastic surgery in a clinic in Caracas. Chávez first denied that this was possible and then launched an official search, which produced nothing.

Chávez was said to be hiding Montesinos because he owed him favors. In November, 1992, some of the ringleaders of the second failed coup d'état in Venezuela, including men loyal to Chávez, flew to Peru, where Montesinos gave them sanctuary. There were also suggestions that Montesinos may have helped finance Chávez's 1998 Presidential campaign, and that Chávez was somehow involved with Montesinos's arms-trafficking activities, which included shipping weapons to guerrillas in Colombia. There was, and still is, no proof of these allegations, but the rumors persist, particularly because of the circumstances under which Montesinos was finally captured.

On June 24th, while presiding over a meeting of Latin-American Presidents in Venezuela, Chávez theatrically announced that Montesinos had been seized by Venezuelan authorities in Caracas the night before. Montesinos was bundled onto a plane and flown to Lima, where he was charged with a variety of crimes, including torture, murder, drug- and arms-trafficking, bribery, and blackmail. He was placed in a maximum-security prison cell, where he remains today. Almost immediately, however, the F.B.I. and Peruvian security officials insisted that they, not the Venezuelans, deserved the credit for tracking Montesinos down, and implied that Chávez had made the "capture" to save face. Ambassadors were withdrawn and denials were published, but Peru's new President, Alejandro Toledo, avoided saying anything that might bring him into conflict with Chávez. The Montesinos problem between Venezuela and Peru was apparently put to rest on July 28th, when Chávez showed up for Toledo's inauguration. He greeted him with a friendly embrace. "We won't permit a small group of mafiosos, extortionists, and blackmailers to perturb the sacred love between our peoples," he said. Three Peruvian congressmen chanted, "Chávez, dictator!" on the floor of the Congress after the swearing-in, and Chávez walked up to them and shouted something back. He claimed later that he had managed to shake hands with one of them.

In mid-August, Fidel Castro came to Venezuela to celebrate his seventy-fifth birthday. He and Chávez took a trip to Canaima National Park to see the most spectacular *tepui* mountains. They flew over Angel Falls. In a ceremony held in the Venezuelan state of Bolívar, Chávez bestowed a medal on Fidel, who said that he accepted it not for himself but on behalf of the Cuban people's struggle against the United States. The two leaders did a little business, expanding their coöperation agreement so that in exchange for its oil shipments Venezuela will receive Cuban experts in tourism and agriculture as well as in sports, medicine, and education. "It's not just a commercial deal," Chávez said. "We're not just counting up 'I'll sell you this, you sell me that.' It's coöperation from the soul, a brotherhood." A few days earlier, the small United States military mission in Caracas, which has occupied an office in Fuerte Tiuna for the past forty years, was asked to move out. The Army needed the space.

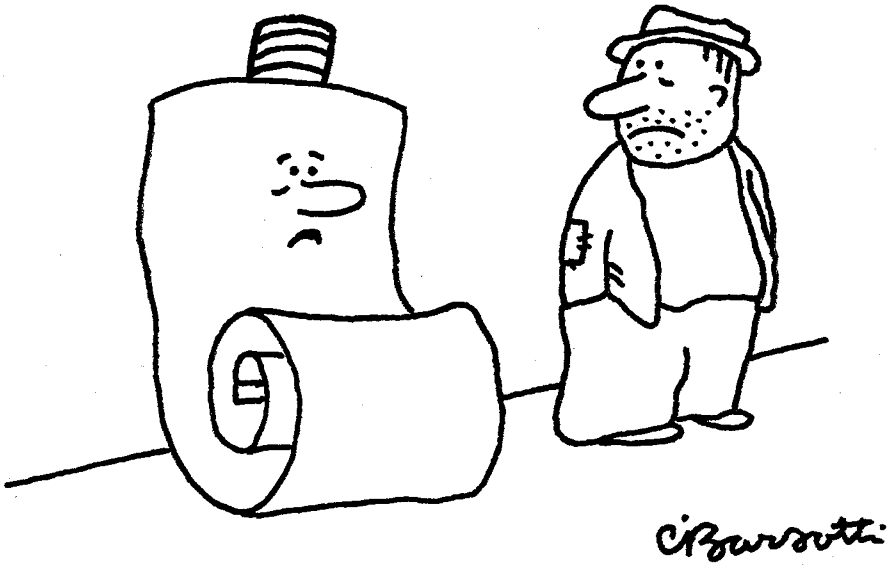
Fuerte Tiuna is a calm, clean, orderly place with clipped lawns and newly painted barracks and stables. Soldiers in crisp uniforms salute nearly everyone who crosses their paths. There is a bronze statue of Simón Bolívar on the ground level of the big atrium of the Defense Ministry building, under a stained-glass skylight depicting El Libertador on the battlefield. The balconies of several floors of offices overlook the atrium. Chávez's office is on one of the upper floors. The morning I met him there, he was dressed in a tan military uniform encrusted with ribbons and medals. I gave him all the letters I was carrying for him, and we went through each of them before he handed them over to an assistant.

"Did you know," Chávez said, "that this is the very room I was brought to as a prisoner on the fourth of February, 1992, after I surrendered? I sat on that very couch over there." He pointed to a sofa across the room. "Everything is exactly the same." He told me how he had persuaded the military commanders to let him go on live television to address his comrades, who were still fighting. Chávez said that he hadn't rehearsed anything. "All I knew was that I didn't want to appear before the nation looking like Noriega when he surrendered to the gringos, defeated and with a number hanging around his neck." He said that "an inner voice" had suddenly begun speaking for him. "I don't know what it was. My subconscious or something." The words had just spilled out of him, he said. Then he repeated, verbatim, the speech he had delivered that night.

I asked Chávez about the problems he faced, now that he was in power, and he drew a series of arrows and blocks on a piece of paper. These were his "actions" and his "obstacles." He said that he had won the first phase of the revolution, the political phase, which included the Presidential victory and the successful referendum for the new constitution. The next phase, he said, was the socioeconomic revolution, and his enemies were trying to prevent him from carrying it out. He drew a new, straight arrow and, in front of it, more blocks, and then another arrow that veered off to one side. The two arrows represented the courses he now faced, Chávez said. The straight arrow was for "revolution" and the other, pliant one represented "reformism."

"Maybe, within two years," Chávez said, "we will be able to say that the Bolivarian revolution overcame its obstacles." He pointed his pen at the straight arrow. "Or else that it was obliged to deviate, and ended up being a reformation." He stabbed at the pliant arrow. "But *that*," he added, "would be very damaging, not just for our process but also for our country, because the truth is, we need a revolution here, and if we can't achieve it now it will come later, with another face, other characteristics. . . . Maybe in the same way as when we came out, one midnight, with guns."

Chávez admitted that there was still some "misunderstanding and confusion," especially in the United States, about exactly what his policies were. "Until recently," he said, "what was being mooted, here as well as abroad, was the taming of Chávez. Let's treat him well, and see if we can tame him." He laughed gruffly. "But it seems that this beast isn't very tamable." He lowered his voice, and he didn't smile. "This is about an ideological *conviction* of mine, and nothing is going to change it." ♦



"I gave and I gave, until there was nothing left to give."

PERSONAL HISTORY

MY FATHER'S BRAIN

What Alzheimer's takes away.

BY JONATHAN FRANZEN

Here's a memory. On an overcast morning in February, 1996, I received in the mail from my mother, in St. Louis, a Valentine's package containing one pinkly romantic greeting card, two four-ounce Mr. Goodbars, one hollow red filigree heart on a loop of thread, and one copy of a neuropathologist's report on my father's brain autopsy.

I remember the bright-gray winter light that morning. I remember leaving the candy, the card, and the ornament in my living room, taking the autopsy report into my bedroom, and sitting down to read it. *The brain* (it began) *weighed 1,255 gm and showed parasagittal atrophy with sulcal widening.* I remember translating grams into pounds and pounds into the familiar shrink-wrapped equivalents in a supermarket meat case. I remember putting the report back into its envelope without reading any further.

Some years before he died, my father had participated in a study of memory and aging at Washington University, and one of the perks for participants was a post-mortem brain autopsy, free of charge. I suspect that the study offered other perks of monitoring and treatment which had led my mother, who loved freebies of all kinds, to insist that my father volunteer for it. Thrift was also probably her only conscious motive for including the autopsy report in my Valentine's package. She was saving thirty-two cents' postage.

My clearest memories of that February morning are visual and spatial: the yellow Mr. Goodbar, my shift from living room to bedroom, the late-morning light of a season as far from the winter solstice as from spring. I'm aware, however, that even these memories aren't to be trusted. According to the latest theories, which are based on a wealth of neurological and psychological research in the last few decades, the brain is not an album in which memories are stored discretely like unchanging photographs. Instead, a memory is, in the phrase of the psychologist Daniel L. Schacter, a "temporary constellation" of activity—a necessarily approximate excitation of neural circuits that bind a set of sensory images and semantic data into the momentary sensation of a remembered whole. These images and data are seldom the exclusive property of one particular memory. Indeed, even as my experience on that Valentine's morning was unfolding, my brain was relying on preëxisting categories of "red" and "heart" and "Mr. Goodbar"; the gray sky in my windows was familiar from a thousand other winter mornings; and I already had millions of neurons devoted to a picture of my mother—her stinginess with postage, her romantic attachments to her children, her lingering anger toward my father, her weird lack of tact, and so on. What my memory of that morning therefore consists of, according to the latest models, is a set of hardwired neuronal connections among the pertinent regions of the brain, and a predisposition for the entire constellation to light up—chemically, electrically—when any one part of the circuit is stimulated. Speak the words "Mr. Goodbar" and ask me to free-associate, and if I don't say "Diane Keaton" I will surely say "brain autopsy."

My Valentine's memory would work this way even if I were dredging it up now for the first time ever. But the fact is that I've re-remembered that February morning countless times since then. I've told the story to my brothers. I've offered it as an Outrageous Mother Incident to friends of mine who enjoy that kind of thing. I've even, shameful to report, told people I hardly know at all. Each succeeding recollection and retelling reinforces the constellation of images and

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knowledge that constitute the memory. At the cellular level, according to neuroscientists, I'm burning the memory in a little deeper each time, strengthening the dendritic connections among its components, further encouraging the firing of that specific set of synapses. One of the great adaptive virtues of our brains, the feature that makes our gray matter so much smarter than any machine yet devised (my laptop's cluttered hard drive or a World Wide Web that insists on recalling, in pellucid detail, a "Beverly Hills 90210" fan site last updated on 11/20/98), is our ability to forget almost everything that has ever happened to us. I retain general, largely categorical memories of the past (a year spent in Spain; various visits to Indian restaurants on East Sixth Street) but relatively few specific, episodic memories. Those memories that I do retain I tend to revisit and, thereby, strengthen. They become—morphologically, electrochemically—part of the architecture of my brain.

This model of memory, which I've presented here in a rather loose layperson's summary, excites the amateur scientist in me. It feels true to the twinned fuzziness and richness of my own memories, and it inspires awe with its image of neural networks effortlessly self-coördinating, in a massively parallel way, to create my ghostly consciousness and my remarkably sturdy sense of self. It seems to me lovely and postmodern. The human brain is a web of a hundred billion neurons, maybe as many as two hundred billion, with trillions of axons and dendrites exchanging quadrillions of messages by way of at least fifty different chemical transmitters. The organ with which we observe and make sense of the universe is, by a comfortable margin, the most complex object we know of in that universe.

And yet it's also a lump of meat. At some point, maybe later on that same Valentine's Day, I forced myself to read the entire pathology report. It included a "Microscopic Description" of my father's brain:

> Sections of the frontal, parietal, occipital, and temporal cerebral cortices showed numerous senile plaques, prominently diffuse type, with minimal numbers of neurofibrillary tangles. Cortical Lewy bodies were easily detected in H&E stained material. The amygdala demonstrated plaques, occasional tangles and mild neuron loss.

In the notice that we had run in local newspapers nine months earlier, my mother insisted that we say my father had died "after long illness." She liked the phrase's formality and reticence, but it was hard not to hear her grievance in it as well, her emphasis on "long." The pathologist's identification of senile plaques in my father's brain served to confirm, as only an autopsy could, the fact with which she'd struggled daily for many years: like millions of other Americans, my father had had Alzheimer's disease.

This was his disease. It was also, you could argue, his story. But you have to let me tell it.

Alzheimer's is a disease of classically "insidious onset." Since even healthy people become more forgetful as they age, there's no way to pinpoint the first memory to fall victim to it. The problem was especially vexed in the case of my father, who not only was depressive and reserved and slightly deaf but also was taking strong medicines for other ailments. For a long time, it was possible to chalk up his non sequiturs to his hearing impairment, his forgetfulness to his depression, his hallucinations to his medicines; and chalk them up we did.

My memories of the years of my father's initial decline are vividly about things other than him. Indeed, I'm somewhat appalled by how large I loom in my own memories, how peripheral my parents are. But I was living far from home in those years. My information came mainly from my mother's complaints about my father, and these complaints I took with a grain of salt; she'd been complaining to me pretty much all my life.

My parents' marriage was, it's safe to say, less than happy. They stayed together for the sake of their children and for want of hope that divorce would make them any happier. As long as my father was working, they enjoyed autonomy in their respective fiefdoms of home and workplace, but after he retired, in 1981, they commenced a round-the-clock performance of "No Exit" in their comfortably furnished suburban house. I arrived for brief visits like a U.N. peacekeeping force to which each side passionately presented its case against the other.

In contrast to my mother, who was hospitalized nearly thirty times in her life, my father had perfect health until he retired. His parents and uncles had lived into their eighties and nineties, and he, Earl Franzen, fully expected himself to be around at ninety "to see," as he liked to say, "how things turn out." (His anagrammatic namesake Lear imagined his last years in similar terms: listening to "court news," with Cordelia, to see "who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out.") My father had no hobbies and few pleasures besides eating meals, seeing his children, and playing bridge, but he did take a *narrative* interest in life. He watched a staggering amount of TV news. His ambition for old age was to follow the unfolding histories of the nation and his children for as long as he could.

The passivity of this ambition, the sameness of his days, tended to make him invisible to me. From the early years of his mental decline I can dredge up exactly one direct memory: watching him, toward the end of the eighties, struggle and fail to calculate the tip on a restaurant bill.

Fortunately, my mother was a great writer of letters. My father's passivity, which I regarded as regrettable but not really any of my business, was a source of bitter disappointment to her. As late as the fall of 1989—a season in which, according to her letters, my father was still playing golf and undertaking major home repairs—the terms of her complaints remained strictly personal:

> It is extremely difficult living with a very unhappy person when you know you must be the major cause of the unhappiness. *Decades* ago when Dad told me he didn't believe there is such a thing as love (that sex is a "trap") and that he was not cut out to be a "happy" person I should have been smart enough to realize there was no hope for a relationship satisfactory to *me*.

This letter dates from a period during which the theatre of my parents' war had shifted to the issue of my father's hearing impairment. My mother maintained that it was inconsiderate not to wear a hearing aid; my father complained that other people lacked the consideration to "speak up." The battle culminated Pyrrhically, in his purchase of a hearing aid that he then declined to wear. Here again, my mother constructed a moral story of his "stubbornness" and "vanity" and "defeatism"; but it's hard not to suspect, in hindsight, that his faulty ears were already serving to camouflage more serious trouble.

A letter from January, 1990, contains my mother's first written reference to this trouble:

> Last week one day he had to skip his breakfasttime medication in order to take some motor skills tests at Wash U. where he is in the Memory & Ageing study. That night I awakened to the sound of his electric razor, looked at the clock & he was in the bathroom shaving at 2:30 AM.

Within a few months, my father was making so many mistakes that my mother was forced to entertain other explanations:

> Either he's stressed or not concentrating or having some mental deterioration but there have been quite a few incidents recently that really worry me. He keeps leaving the car door open or the lights on & twice in one week we had to call triple A & have them come out & charge the battery (now I've posted signs in the garage & that seems to have helped). . . . I really don't like the idea of leaving him in the house alone for more than a short while.

My mother's fear of leaving him alone assumed greater urgency as the year dragged on. Her right knee was worn out, and, because she already had a steel plate in her leg from an earlier fracture, she was facing complicated surgery followed by prolonged recovery and rehab. Her letters from late 1990 and early 1991 are marked by paragraphs of agonizing over whether to have surgery and how to manage my father if she did:

> Were he in the house alone more than overnight with me in the hospital I would be an absolute basket case as he leaves the water running, the stove on at times, lights on everywhere, etc. . . . I check & recheck as much as I can on most things lately but even so many of our affairs are in a state of confusion & what really is hardest is his resentment of my intrusion—"stay out of my affairs!!!" He does not accept or realize my *wanting* to be *helpful* & that is the hardest thing of all for me.

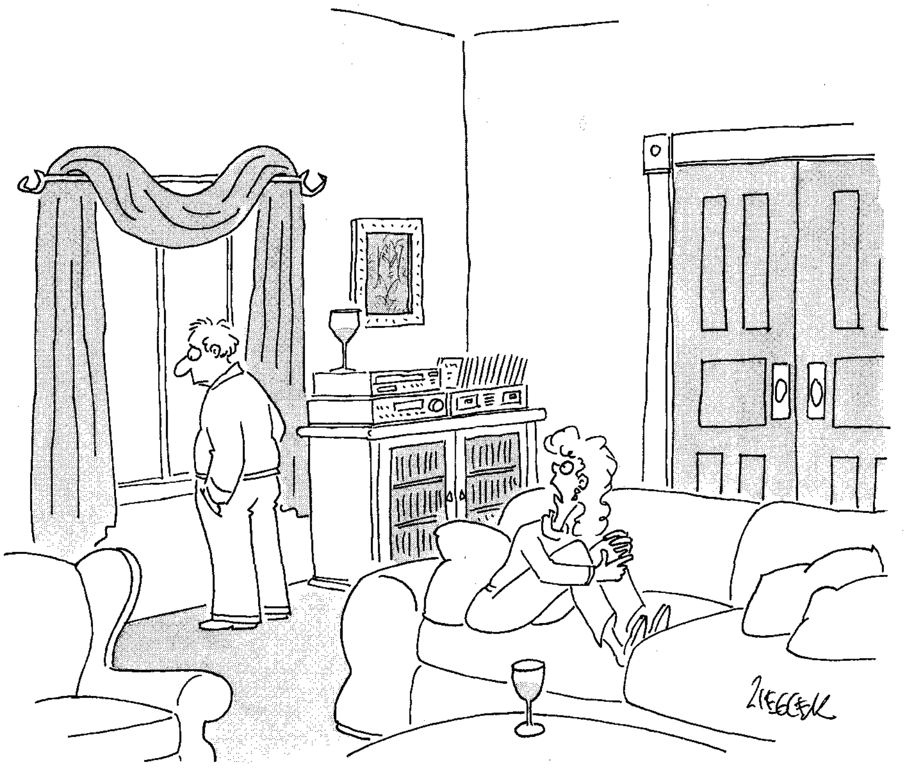
"Do you have something that doesn't scream 'tie'?"

• •

At the time, I'd recently finished my second novel, and so I offered to stay with my father while my mother had her operation. To steer clear of his pride, she and I agreed to pretend that I was coming for her sake, not his. What's odd, though, is that I was only half-pretending. My mother's characterization of my father's incapacity was compelling, but so was my father's portrayal of my mother as an alarmist nag. I went to St. Louis because, for her, his incapacity was absolutely real; once there, I behaved as if, for me, it absolutely wasn't.

My mother was in the hospital for nearly five weeks. Strangely, although I'd never lived alone with my father for so long and never would again, I can now remember almost nothing specific about my stay with him; I have a general impression that he was somewhat quiet, maybe, but otherwise completely normal. Here, you might think, was a direct contradiction of my mother's earlier reports. And yet I have no memory of being bothered by the contradiction. What I do have is a copy of a letter that I wrote to a friend while in St. Louis. In the letter, I mention that my father has had his medication adjusted and now everything is fine.

Wishful thinking? Yes, to some extent. But one of the basic features of the mind is its keenness to construct wholes out of fragmentary parts. We all have a blind spot in our vision where the optic nerve attaches to the retina, but our brain unfailingly registers a seamless world around us. We catch part of a word and hear the whole. We see expressive faces in floral-pattern upholstery; we constantly fill in blanks. In a similar way, I think I was inclined to interpolate across my father's silences and mental absences and to persist in seeing him as the same old wholly whole Earl Franzen. I still needed him to be an actor in my story of myself. In my letter to my friend, I describe a morning practice session of the St. Louis Symphony that my mother insisted my father and I attend so as not to waste her free tickets to it. After the first half of the session, in which the very young Midori *nailed* the Sibelius violin concerto, my father sprang from his seat with miserable geriatric agitation. "So," he said, "we'll go now." I knew better



"You asked me to believe in your stock options, Freddie, and I believed."

• •

than to ask him to sit through the Charles Ives symphony that was coming, but I hated him for what I took to be his philistinism. On the drive home, he had one comment about Midori and Sibelius. "I don't understand that music," he said. "What do they do—memorize it?"

Later that spring, my father was diagnosed with a small, slow-growing cancer in his prostate. His doctors recommended that he not bother treating it, but he insisted on a course of radiation. With a kind of referred wisdom about his own mental state, he became terrified that something was dreadfully wrong with him: that he would not, after all, survive into his nineties. My mother, whose knee continued to bleed internally six months after her operation, had little patience with what she considered his hypochondria. In September, 1991, she wrote:

> I'm relieved to have Dad started on his radiation therapy & it forces him to get out of the house *every day* [inserted here a smiley face]—a big plus. . . . Actually, being so sedentary now (content to do nothing), he has had too much time to worry & think about himself—he NEEDS distractions! . . . More & more I feel the greatest attributes anyone can have are (1), a positive attitude & (2), a sense of humor—wish Dad had them.

There ensued some months of relative optimism. The cancer was eradicated, my mother's knee improved, and her native hopefulness returned to her letters. She reported that my father had taken first place in a game of bridge: "With his confusion cleared up & his less conservative approach to the game he is doing remarkably well & it's about the only thing he enjoys (& can stay awake for!)." But my father's anxiety about his health did not abate; he had stomach pains that he was convinced were caused by cancer. Gradually, the import of the story my mother was telling me migrated from the personal and the moral toward the psychiatric. "The past six months we have lost so many friends it is very unsettling—part of Dad's nervousness & depression I'm sure," she wrote in February, 1992. The letter continued:

> Dad's internist, Dr. Rouse, has about concluded what I have felt all along regarding Dad's stomach discomfort (he's ruled out all clinical possibilities). Dad is (1) terribly nervous, (2) terribly depressed & I hope Dr. Rouse will put him on an anti-depressant. I *know* there has to be help for this. . . . If he won't go for counseling (suggested by Dr. Weiss) perhaps he now will accept pills or whatever it takes for nervousness & depression.

For a while, the phrase "nervousness & depression" was a fixture of her letters. Prozac briefly seemed to lift my father's spirits, but the effects were short-lived. Finally, in July, 1992, to my surprise, he agreed to see a psychiatrist.

My father had always been supremely suspicious of psychiatry. He viewed therapy as an invasion of privacy, mental health as a matter of self-discipline, and my mother's increasingly pointed suggestions that he "talk to someone" as acts of aggression—little lobbed grenades of blame for their unhappiness as a couple. It was a measure of his desperation that he had voluntarily set foot in a psychiatrist's office.

In October, when I stopped in St. Louis on my way to Italy, I asked him about his sessions with the doctor. He made a hopeless gesture with his hands. "He's extremely able," he said. "But I'm afraid he's written me off."

The idea of anybody writing my father off was more than I could stand. From Italy, I sent the psychiatrist a three-page appeal for reconsideration, but even as I was writing it the roof was caving in at home. "Much as I dislike telling you," my mother wrote in a letter faxed to Italy, "Dad has regressed terribly. Medicine for the urinary problem a urologist is treating in combination with medication for depression and nervousness blew his mind again and the hallucinating, etc., was terrible." There had been a weekend with my Uncle Erv in Indiana, where my father, removed from his familiar surroundings, unleashed a night of madness that culminated in my uncle's shouting into his face, "Earl, my God, it's your brother, Erv, we slept in the same bed!" Back in St. Louis, my father had begun to rage against the retired lady, Mrs. Pryble, whom my mother had engaged to sit with him two mornings a week while she ran errands. He didn't see why he needed sitting, and, even assuming that he did need sitting, he didn't see why a stranger, rather than his wife, should be doing it. He'd become a classic "sundowner," dozing through the day and rampaging in the wee hours.

There followed a dismal holiday when my wife and I finally intervened on my mother's behalf and put her in touch with a geriatric social worker, and my mother urged my wife and me to tire my father out so that he would sleep through the night without psychotic incident, and my father sat stone-faced by the fireplace or told grim stories of his childhood while my mother fretted about the expense, the prohibitive expense, of sessions with a social worker. But even then, as far as I can remember, nobody ever said "dementia." In all my mother's letters to me, the word "Alzheimer's" appears exactly once, in reference to an old woman I worked for as a teen-ager.

I remember my suspicion and annoyance, fifteen years ago, when the term "Alzheimer's disease" was first achieving currency. It seemed to me another instance of the medicalization of human experience, the latest entry in the ever-expanding nomenclature of victimhood. To my mother's news about my old employer I replied, "What you describe sounds like the same old Erika, only quite a bit worse; and that's not how Alzheimer's is supposed to work, is it? I spend a few minutes every month fretting about ordinary mental illness being trendily misdiagnosed as Alzheimer's."

From my current vantage, where I spend a few minutes every month fretting about what a self-righteous thirty-year-old I was, I can see my reluctance to apply the term Alzheimer's to my father as a way of protecting the specificity of Earl Franzen from the generality of a nameable condition. Conditions have symptoms; symptoms point to the organic basis of everything we are. They point to the brain as meat. And, where I ought to recognize that, yes, the brain is meat, I seem instead to maintain a blind spot across which I then interpolate stories that emphasize the more soul-like aspects of the self. Seeing my afflicted father as a set of organic symptoms would invite me to understand the *healthy* Earl Franzen (and the healthy me) in symptomatic terms as well—to reduce our beloved personalities to finite sets of neurochemical coördinates. Who wants a story of life like that?

Even now, I feel uneasy when I gather facts about Alzheimer's. Reading, for example, David Shenk's excellent new book, "The Forgetting: Alzheimer's: Portrait of an Epidemic," I'm reminded that when my father got lost in his own neighborhood, or forgot to flush the toilet, he was exhibiting symptoms identical to those of millions of other afflicted people. There can be comfort in having company like this, but I'm sorry to see the personal significance drained from certain mistakes of my father's, like his confusion of my mother with her mother, which struck me at the time as singular and orphic, and from which I gleaned all manner of important new insights into my parents' marriage. My sense of private selfhood turns out to have been illusory.

Senile dementia has been around for as long as people have had the means of recording it. While the average human life span remained low and old age was a comparative rarity, senility was considered a natural by-product of aging—perhaps the result of sclerotic cerebral arteries. The German neuropathologist Alois Alzheimer believed he was witnessing an entirely new variety of mental illness when, in 1901, he admitted to his clinic a fifty-one-year-old woman, Auguste D., who was suffering from bizarre mood swings and severe memory loss and who, in Alzheimer's initial examination of her, gave problematic answers to his questions:

> "What is your name?"
> "Auguste."
> "Last name?"
> "Auguste."
> "What is your husband's name?"
> "Auguste, I think."

When Auguste D. died in an institution, four years later, Alzheimer availed himself of recent advances in microscopy and tissue staining and was able to discern, in slides of her brain tissue, the striking dual pathology of her disease: countless sticky-looking globs of "plaque," and countless neurons engulfed by "tangles" of neuronal fibrils. Alzheimer's findings greatly interested his patron Emil Kraepelin, then the dean of German psychiatry, who was engaged in a fierce scientific battle with Sigmund Freud and Freud's psycho-literary theories of mental illness. To Kraepelin, Alzheimer's plaques and tangles provided welcome clinical support for his contention that mental illness was fundamentally organic. In his "Handbook of Psychiatry" he

"It's not a bear, sweetie. It's the pizza."

dubbed Auguste D.'s condition *Morbus Alzheimer*.

For six decades after Alois Alzheimer's autopsy of Auguste D., even as breakthroughs in disease prevention and treatment were adding fifteen years to life expectancy in developed nations, Alzheimer's continued to be viewed as a medical rarity à la Huntington's disease. David Shenk tells the story of an American neuropathologist named Meta Neumann who, in the early fifties, autopsied the brains of two hundred and ten victims of senile dementia and found sclerotic arteries in few of them, plaques and tangles in the majority. Here was ironclad evidence that Alzheimer's was far more common than anyone had guessed; but Neumann's work appears to have persuaded no one. "They felt that Meta was talking nonsense," her husband recalled.

The scientific community simply wasn't ready to consider that senile dementia might be more than a natural consequence of aging. In the early fifties, there was no self-conscious category of "seniors," no explosion of Sun Belt retirement developments, no A.A.R.P., no Early Bird tradition at low-end restaurants; and scientific thinking reflected these social realities. Not until the seventies did conditions become ripe for a reinterpretation of senile dementia. By then, as Shenk says, "so many people were living so long that senility didn't feel so normal or acceptable anymore." Congress passed the Research on Aging Act in 1974, and established the National Institute on Aging, for which funding soon mushroomed. By the end of the eighties, at the crest of my annoyance with the clinical term and its sudden ubiquity, Alzheimer's had achieved the same social and medical standing as heart disease or cancer—and had the research-funding levels to show for it.

What happened with Alzheimer's in the seventies and the eighties wasn't simply a diagnostic paradigm shift. The number of new cases really is soaring. As fewer and fewer people drop dead of heart attacks or die of infections, more and more survive to become demented. Alzheimer's patients in nursing homes live much longer than other patients, at a cost of at least forty thousand dollars annually per patient; until they're institutionalized, they increasingly derange the lives of family members charged with caring for them. Already, five million Americans have the disease, and the number could rise to fifteen million by 2050.

Because there's so much money in chronic illness, drug companies are investing feverishly in proprietary Alzheimer's research while publicly funded scientists file for patents on the side. But because the science of the disease remains cloudy (a functioning brain is not a lot more accessible than the center of the earth or the edge of the universe) nobody can be sure which avenues of research will lead to effective treatments. Early-onset Alzheimer's is usually linked to specific genes, but the vastly more common late-onset variety cannot be traced to a single factor. And the disease's etiology is like the proverbial elephant—it looks like an inflammation of the brain but also like a neurochemical imbalance but also like a disease of abnormal-protein deposition of the kind that occasionally strikes the heart and kidneys.

Treatments currently under study target each of these aspects. People taking cholesterol-reducing drugs or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (like aspirin or Celebrex) may enjoy a lower risk of Alzheimer's. Those who already have the disease can sometimes be helped for a while with acetylcholine-boosting medications or antioxidants like Vitamin E. There is intense competition among drug companies to develop enzyme inhibitors that zero in on the abnormal proteins. On the immunological front, researchers at Elan Pharmaceuticals recently came up with the seemingly outlandish idea of a vaccine for Alzheimer's—of teaching the immune system to produce antibodies that attack and destroy amyloid plaques in the brain—and found that the vaccine not only prevented plaque formation in transgenic mice but actually reversed the mental deterioration of mice already addled by it. Over all, the feeling in the field seems to be that if you're under fifty you can reasonably expect to be offered effective drugs for Alzheimer's by the time you need them. Then again, twenty years ago, many cancer researchers were predicting a cure within twenty years.

David Shenk, who is comfortably under fifty, makes the case in "The Forgetting" that a cure for senile dementia might not be an unmitigated blessing. He notes, for example, that one striking peculiarity of the disease is that its sufferers often suffer less and less as it progresses. Caring for an Alzheimer's patient is gruellingly repetitious precisely because the patient himself has lost the cerebral equipment to experience anything as a repetition. Shenk quotes patients who speak of "something delicious in oblivion" and who report an enhancement of their sensory pleasures as they come to dwell in an eternal, pastless Now. If your short-term memory is shot, you don't remember, as you stoop to smell a rose, that you've been stooping to smell the same rose all morning.

As the psychiatrist Barry Reisberg first observed twenty years ago, the decline of an Alzheimer's patient mirrors in reverse the neurological development of a child. The earliest capacities a child develops—raising the head (at one to three months), smiling (two to four months), sitting up unassisted (six to ten months)—are the last capacities an Alzheimer's patient loses. Brain development in a growing child is consolidated through a process called myelinization, wherein the axonal connections between neurons are gradually strengthened by sheathings of the fatty substance myelin. Apparently, since the last regions of the child's brain to mature remain the least myelinated, they're the regions most vulnerable to the insult of Alzheimer's. The hippocampus, which processes short-term memories into long-term, is very slow to myelinize. This is why we're unable to form permanent episodic memories before the age of three or four, and why the hippocampus is where the plaques and tangles of Alzheimer's first appear. Hence the ghostly apparition of the middle-stage patient who continues to be able to walk and feed herself even as she remembers nothing from hour to hour. The inner child isn't inner anymore. Neurologically speaking, we're looking at a one-year-old.

Although Shenk tries valiantly to see a boon in the Alzheimer's patient's child-

"What I Did on My Summer Vacation: A Mystical Journey of Sexual Awakening."

• •

ish relief from responsibility and childlike focus on the Now, I'm mindful that becoming a baby again was the last thing my father wanted. The stories he told from his childhood, in northern Minnesota, were mainly (as befits a depressive's recollections) horrible: brutal father, unfair mother, endless chores, backwoods poverty, family betrayals, hideous accidents. He told me more than once, after his retirement, that his greatest pleasure in life had been going to work as an adult in the company of other men who valued his abilities. My father was an intensely private person, and privacy for him had the connotation of keeping the shameful content of one's interior life out of public sight. Could there have been a worse disease for him than Alzheimer's? In its early stages, it worked to dissolve the social connections that had saved him from the worst of his depressive isolation. In its later stages, it robbed him of the sheathing of adulthood, the means to hide the child inside him. I wish he'd had a heart attack instead.

Still, shaky though Shenk's arguments for the brighter side of Alzheimer's may be, his core contention is harder to dismiss: senility is not merely an erasure of meaning but a source of meaning. For my mother, the losses of Alzheimer's both amplified and reversed long-standing patterns in her marriage. My father had always refused to open himself to her, and now, increasingly, he *couldn't* open himself. To my mother, he remained the same Earl Franzen napping in the den and failing to hear. She, paradoxically, was the one who slowly and surely lost her self, living with a man who mistook her for her mother, forgot every fact he'd ever known about her, and finally ceased to speak her name. He, who had always insisted on being the boss in the marriage, the maker of decisions, the adult protector of the childlike wife, couldn't help behaving like the child. Now the unseemly outbursts were his, not my mother's. Now she ferried him around town the way she'd once ferried me and my brothers. Task by task, she took charge of their life. And so, although my father's "long illness" was a crushing strain and disappointment to her, it was also an opportunity to grow slowly into an autonomy she'd never been allowed: to settle some very old scores.

As for me, once I accepted the scope of the disaster, the sheer duration of Alzheimer's forced me into unexpectedly welcome closer contact with my mother. I learned, as I might not have otherwise, that I could seriously rely on my brothers and that they could rely on me. And, strangely, although I'd always prized my intelligence and sanity and self-consciousness, I found that watching my father lose all three made me less afraid of losing them myself. I became a little less afraid in general. A bad door opened, and I found I was able to walk through it.

The door in question was on the fourth floor of Barnes Hospital, in St. Louis. About six weeks after my wife and I had put my mother in touch with the social worker and gone back East, my oldest brother and my father's doctors persuaded him to enter the hospital for testing. The idea was to get all the medications out of his bloodstream and see what we were dealing with underneath. My mother helped him check in and spent the afternoon settling him into his room. He was still his usual, semi-present self when she left for dinner, but that evening, at home, she began to get calls from the hospital, first from my father, who demanded that she come and remove him from "this hotel," and then from nurses who reported that he'd become belligerent. When she returned to the hospital in the morning, she found him altogether gone—raving mad, profoundly disoriented.

I flew back to St. Louis a week later. My mother took me straight from the airport to the hospital. While she spoke to the nurses, I went to my father's room and found him in bed, wide awake. I said hello. He made frantic shushing gestures and beckoned me to his pillow. I leaned over him and he asked me, in a husky whisper, to keep my voice down because "they" were "listening." I asked him who "they" were. He couldn't tell me, but his eyes rolled fearfully to scan the room, as if he'd lately seen "them" everywhere and were puzzled by "their" disappearance. When my mother appeared in the doorway, he confided to me, in an even lower whisper, "I think they've gotten to your mother."

My memories of the week that followed are mainly a blur, punctuated by a couple of life-changing scenes. I went to the hospital every day and sat with my father for as many hours as I could stand. At no point did he string together two coherent sentences. The memory that appears to me most significant in hindsight is a very peculiar one. It's lit by a dreamlike indoor twilight, it's set in a hospital room whose orientation and cramped layout are unfamiliar from any of my other memories, and it returns to me now without any of the chronological markers that usually characterize my memories. I'm not sure it even dates from that first week I saw my father in the hospital. And yet I am sure that I'm not remembering a dream. All memories, the neuroscientists say, are actually memories of memory, but usually they don't feel that way. Here's one that does. I remember remembering: my father in bed, my mother sitting beside it, me standing near the door. We've been having an anguished family conversation, possibly about where to move my father after his discharge from the hospital. It's a conversation that my father, to the slight extent that he can follow it, is hating. Finally, he cries out with passionate emphasis, as if he has had enough of all the nonsense, "I have *always* loved your mother. *Always*." And my mother buries her face in her hands and sobs.

This was the only time I ever heard my father say he loved her. I'm certain the memory is legitimate because the scene seemed to me immensely significant even at the time, and I then described it to my wife and brothers and incorporated it into the story I was telling myself about my parents. In later years, when my mother insisted that my father had never said he loved her, not even once, I asked if she remembered that time in the hospital. I repeated what he'd said, and she shook her head uncertainly. "Maybe," she said. "Maybe he did. I don't remember that."

My brothers and I took turns going to St. Louis every few months. My father never failed to recognize me as someone he was happy to see. His life in a nursing home appeared to be an end-

"I'm thinkin' blond."

less troubled dream populated by figments from his past and by his deformed and brain-damaged fellow-inmates; his nurses were less like actors in the dream than like unwelcome intruders on it. Unlike many of the female inmates, who at one moment were wailing like babies and at the next moment glowing with pleasure while someone fed them ice cream, my father never cried, and the pleasure he took in ice cream never ceased to look like an adult's. He gave me significant nods and wistful smiles as he confided to me fragments of nonsense to which I nodded as if I understood. His most consistently near-coherent theme was his wish to be removed from "this hotel" and his inability to understand why he couldn't live in a little apartment and let my mother take care of him.

For Thanksgiving that year, my mother and my wife and I checked him out of the nursing home and brought him home with a wheelchair in my Volvo station wagon. He hadn't been in the house since he'd last been living there, ten months earlier. If my mother had been hoping for a gratifying show of pleasure from him, she was disappointed; by then, a change of venue no more impressed my father than it does a one-year-old. We sat by the fireplace and, out of unthinking, wretched habit, took pictures of a man who, if he knew nothing else, seemed full of unhappy knowledge of how dismal a subject for photographs he was. The images are awful to me now: my father listing in his wheelchair like an unstrung marionette, eyes mad and staring, mouth sagging, glasses smeared with strobe light and nearly falling off his nose; my mother's face a mask of reasonably well-contained despair; and my wife and I flashing grotesquely strained smiles as we reach to touch my father. At the dinner table, my mother spread a bath towel over him and cut his turkey into little bites. She kept asking him if he was happy to be having Thanksgiving dinner at home. He responded with silence, shifting eyes, sometimes a faint shrug. My brothers called to wish him a happy holiday, and here, out of the blue, he mustered a smile and a hearty voice; he was able to answer simple questions and thanked them both for calling.

This much of the evening was typically Alzheimer's. Because children learn social skills very early, a capacity for gestures of courtesy and phrases of vague graciousness survives in many Alzheimer's patients long after their memories are shot. It wasn't so remarkable that my father was able to handle (sort of) my brothers' holiday calls. But consider what happened next, after dinner, outside the nursing home. While my wife ran inside for a geri chair, my father sat beside me and studied the institutional portal that he was about to reënter. "Better not to leave," he told me in a clear, strong voice, "than to have to come back." This was not a vague phrase; it pertained directly to the situation at hand, and it suggested an awareness of his larger plight and his connection to the past and to the future. He was requesting that he be spared the pain of being dragged back toward consciousness and memory. And, sure enough, on the morning after Thanksgiving, and for the remainder of our visit, he was as crazy as I ever saw him, his words a hash of random syllables, his body a big flail of agitation.

For David Shenk, one of the most illuminating aspects of Alzheimer's is its slowing down of death. Shenk likens the disease to a prism that refracts death into a spectrum of its otherwise tightly conjoined parts—death of autonomy, death of memory, death of self-consciousness, death of personality, death of body—and he subscribes to the most common trope of Alzheimer's: that its particular sadness and horror stem from the sufferer's loss of his or her "self" long before the body dies.

This seems mostly right to me. By the time my father's heart stopped, I'd been mourning him for years. And yet, when I consider his story, I wonder whether the various deaths can ever really be so separated, and whether memory and consciousness have such secure title, after all, to the seat of selfhood. I can't stop looking for meaning in the two years that followed his loss of his supposed "self," and I can't stop finding it.

I'm struck, above all, by the apparent persistence of his *will.* I'm powerless not to believe that he was exerting some bodily remnant of his self-discipline, some reserve of strength in the sinews beneath both consciousness and memory, when he pulled himself together for the statement he made to me outside the nursing home. I'm powerless as well not to believe that his crash on the following morning, like his crash on his first night alone in a hospital, amounted to a relinquishment of that will, a letting go, an embrace of madness in the face of unbearable emotion. Although we can fix the starting point of his decline (full consciousness and sanity) and the end point (oblivion and death), his brain wasn't simply a computational device running gradually and inex-

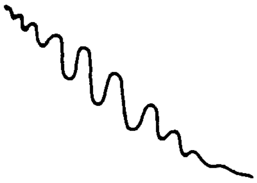
THE KISS

It must appear accidental,
betrayed neither by your gestures
nor the easy motion of your skirt.
The light is *just so.*
This is the moment—not
consummation, decisive and finite,
but those boundless seconds *before*
when you can draw *after* out from hiding.

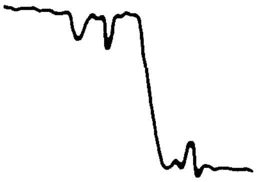
Do not move forward, do not move
a finger. Waiting is perfection, a rapture
of your own devising, these shallow breaths
taken out of time, before the sinking in
of things, before the body ruins everything.

—*Kimberly Johnson*

orably amok. Where the subtractive progress of Alzheimer's might predict a steady downward trend like this—



—what I saw of my father's fall looked more like this:



He held himself together longer, I suspect, than it might have seemed he had the neuronal wherewithal to do. Then he collapsed and fell lower than his pathology may have strictly dictated, and he chose to stay low, ninety-nine per cent of the time. What he *wanted* (in the early years, to stay clear; in the later years, to let go) was integral to what he *was*. And what *I* want (stories of my father's brain that are not about meat) is integral to what I choose to remember and retell.

One of the stories I've come to tell, then, as I try to forgive myself for my long blindness to his condition, is that he was bent on concealing that condition and, for a remarkably long time, retained the strength of character to bring it off. My mother used to swear that this was so. He couldn't fool the woman he lived with, no matter how he bullied her, but he could pull himself together as long he had sons in town or guests in the house. The true solution of the conundrum of my stay with him during my mother's operation probably has less to do with my blindness than with the additional will he was exerting.

After the bad Thanksgiving, when we knew he was never coming home again, I helped my mother sort through his desk. (It's the kind of liberty you take with the desk of a child or a dead person.) In one of his drawers we found evidence of small, covert endeavors not to forget. There was a sheaf of papers on which he'd written the addresses of his children, one address per slip, the same address on several. On another slip he'd written the birth dates of his older sons—"Bob 1-13-48" and "TOM 10-15-50"—and then, in trying to recall mine (August 17, 1959), he had erased the month and day and made a guess on the basis of my brothers' dates: "JON 10-13-49."

Consider, too, what I believe are the last words he ever spoke to me, three months before he died. For a couple of days, I'd been visiting the nursing home for a dutiful ninety minutes and listening to his mutterings about my mother and to his affable speculations about certain tiny objects that he persisted in seeing on the sleeves of his sweater and the knees of his pants. He was no different when I dropped by on my last morning, no different when I wheeled him back to his room and told him I was heading out of town. But then he raised his face toward mine and—again, out of nowhere, his voice was clear and strong—he said, "Thank you for coming. I appreciate your taking the time to see me."

Set phrases of courtesy? A window on his fundamental self? I seem to have little choice about which version to believe.

In relying on my mother's letters to reconstruct my father's disintegration, I feel the shadow of the undocumented years after 1992, when she and I talked on the phone at greater length and ceased to write all but the briefest notes. Plato's description of writing, in the Phaedrus, as a "crutch of memory" seems to me fully accurate: I couldn't tell a clear story of my father without those letters. But, where Plato laments the decline of the oral tradition and the atrophy of memory which writing induces, I at the other end of the Age of the Written Word am impressed by the sturdiness and reliability of words on paper. My mother's letters are truer and more complete than my self-absorbed and biased memories; she's more alive to me in the written phrase "he NEEDS distractions!" than in hours of videotape or stacks of pictures of her.

The will to record indelibly, to set down stories in permanent words, seems to me akin to the conviction that we are larger than our biologies. I wonder if our current cultural susceptibility to the charms of materialism—our increasing willingness to see psychology as chemical, identity as genetic, and behavior as the product of bygone exigencies of human evolution—isn't intimately related to the postmodern resurgence of the oral and the eclipse of the written: our incessant telephoning, our ephemeral E-mailing, our steadfast devotion to the flickering tube.

Have I mentioned that my father, too, wrote letters? Usually typewritten, usually prefaced with an apology for misspellings, they came much less frequently than my mother's. One of the last is from December, 1987:

> This time of the year is always difficult for me. I'm ill at ease with all the gift-giving, as I would love to get things for people but lack the imagination to get the right things. I dread the shopping for things that are the wrong size or the wrong color or something not needed, and anticipate the problems of returning or exchanging. I like to buy tools, but Bob pointed out a problem with this category, when for some occasion I gave him a nice little hammer with good balance, and his comment was that this was the second or third hammer and I don't need any more, thank you. And then there is the problem of gifts for your mother. She is so sentimental that it hurts me not to get her something nice, but she has access to my checking account with no restrictions. I have told her to buy something for herself, and say it is from me, so she can compete with the after-Christmas comment: "See what I got from my husband!" But she won't participate in that fraud. So I suffer through the season.

In 1989, as his powers of concentration waned with his growing "nervousness & depression," my father stopped writing letters altogether. My mother and I were therefore amazed to find, in the same drawer in which he'd left those addresses and birth dates, an unsent letter dated January 22, 1993—unimaginably late, a matter of weeks before his final breakdown. The letter was in an envelope addressed to my nephew Nick, who, at age six, had just begun to write letters himself. Possibly my father was ashamed to send a letter that he knew wasn't fully coherent; more likely, given the state of his hippocampal health, he simply forgot. The letter, which for me has become an emblem of invisibly heroic exertions of the will, is written in a tiny pencilled script that keeps veering away from the horizontal:

> Dear Nick,
>
> We got your letter a couple days ago and were pleased to see how well you were doing in school, particularly in math. It is important to write well, as the ability to exchange ideas will govern the use that one country can make of another country's ideas.
>
> Most of your nearest relatives are good writers, and thereby took the load off me. I should have learned better how to write, but it is so easy to say, Let Mom do it.
>
> I know that my writing will not be easy to read, but I have a problem with the nerves

in my legs and tremors in my hands. In looking at what I have written, I expect you will have difficulty to understand, but with a little luck, I may keep up with you.

We have had a change in the weather from cold and wet to dry with fair blue skies. I hope it stays this way. Keep up the good work.

Love, Grandpa

P.S. Thank you for the gifts.

My father's heart and lungs were very strong, and my mother was bracing herself for two or three more years of endgame when, one day in April, 1995, he stopped eating. Maybe he was having trouble swallowing, or maybe, with his remaining shreds of will, he'd resolved to put an end to his unwanted second childhood.

His blood pressure was seventy over palpable when I flew into town. Again, my mother took me straight to the nursing home from the airport. I found him curled up on his side under a thin sheet, breathing shallowly, his eyes shut loosely. His muscle had wasted away, but his face was smooth and calm and almost entirely free of wrinkles, and his hands, which had changed not at all, seemed curiously large in comparison to the rest of him. There's no way to know if he recognized my voice, but within minutes of my arrival his blood pressure climbed to 120/90. I worried then, worry even now, that I made things harder for him by arriving: that he'd reached the point of being ready to die but was ashamed to perform such a private or disappointing act in front of one of his sons.

My mother and I settled into a rhythm of watching and waiting, one of us sleeping while the other sat in vigil. Hour after hour, my father lay unmoving and worked his way toward death; but when he yawned, the yawn was *his*. And his body, wasted though it was, was likewise still radiantly *his*. Even as the surviving parts of his self grew ever smaller and more fragmented, I persisted in seeing a whole. I still loved, specifically and individually, the man who was yawning in that bed. And how could I not fashion stories out of that love—stories of a man whose will remained intact enough to avert his face when I tried to clear his mouth out with a moist foam swab? I'll go to my own grave insisting that my father was determined to die and to die, as best he could, on his own terms.

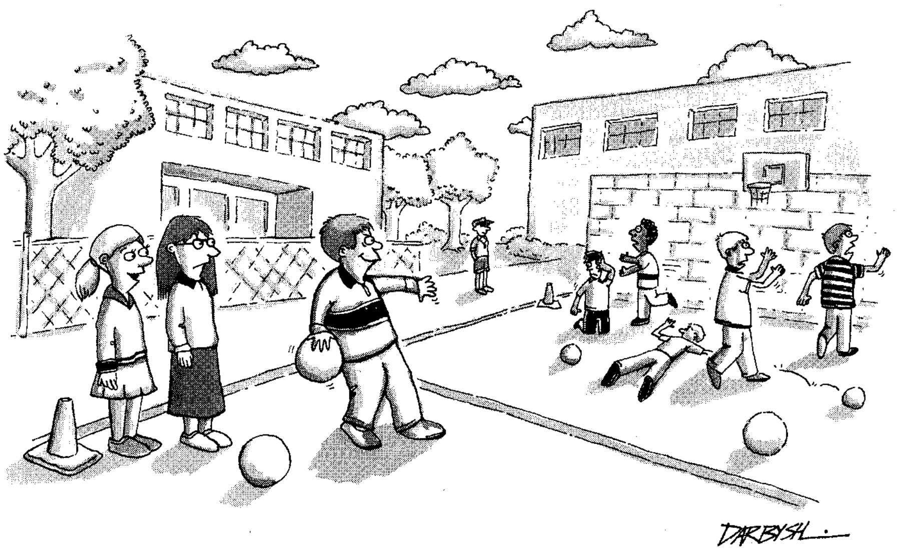
We, for our part, were determined that he not be alone when he died. Maybe this was exactly wrong—maybe all he was waiting for was to be left alone. Nevertheless, on my sixth night in town I stayed up and read a light novel cover to cover while he lay and breathed and loosed his great yawns. A nurse came by, listened to his lungs, and told me he must never have been a smoker. She suggested that I go home to sleep, and she offered to send in a particular nurse from the floor below to visit him. Evidently, the nursing home had a resident angel of death with a special gift for persuading the nearly dead, after their relatives had left for the night, that it was O.K. for them to die. I declined the nurse's offer and performed this service myself. I leaned over my father, who smelled faintly of acetic acid but was otherwise clean and warm. Identifying myself, I told him that whatever he needed to do now was fine by me, he should let go and do it.

Late that afternoon, a big early-summer St. Louis wind kicked up. I was scrambling eggs when my mother called from the nursing home and told me to hurry over. I don't know why I thought I had plenty of time, but I ate the eggs with some toast before I left, and in the nursing-home parking lot I sat in the car and turned up the radio, which was playing the Blues Traveler song that was all the rage that season. No song has ever made me happier. The great white oaks all around the nursing home were swaying and turning pale in the big wind. I felt as though I might fly away with happiness.

And still he didn't die. The storm hit the nursing home in the middle of the evening, knocking out all but the emergency lighting, and my mother and I sat in the dark. I don't like to remember how impatient I was for my father's breathing to stop, how ready to be free of him I was. I don't like to imagine what he was feeling as he lay there, what dim or vivid sensory or emotional forms his struggle took inside his head. But I also don't like to believe that there was nothing.

Toward ten o'clock, my mother and I were conferring with a nurse in the doorway of his room, not long after the lights came back on, when I noticed that he was drawing his hands up toward his throat. I said, "I think something is happening." It was agonal breathing: his chin rising to draw air into his lungs after his heart had stopped beating. He seemed to be nodding very slowly and deeply in the affirmative. And then nothing.

After we'd kissed him goodbye and signed the forms that authorized the brain autopsy, my mother sat down in our kitchen and uncharacteristically accepted my offer of undiluted Jack Daniel's. "I see now," she said, "that when you're dead you're really dead." This was true enough. But, in the slow-motion way of Alzheimer's, my father wasn't much deader now than he'd been two hours or two weeks or two months ago. We'd simply lost the last of the parts out of which we could fashion a living whole. There would be no new memories of him. The only stories we could tell now were the ones we already had. ♦

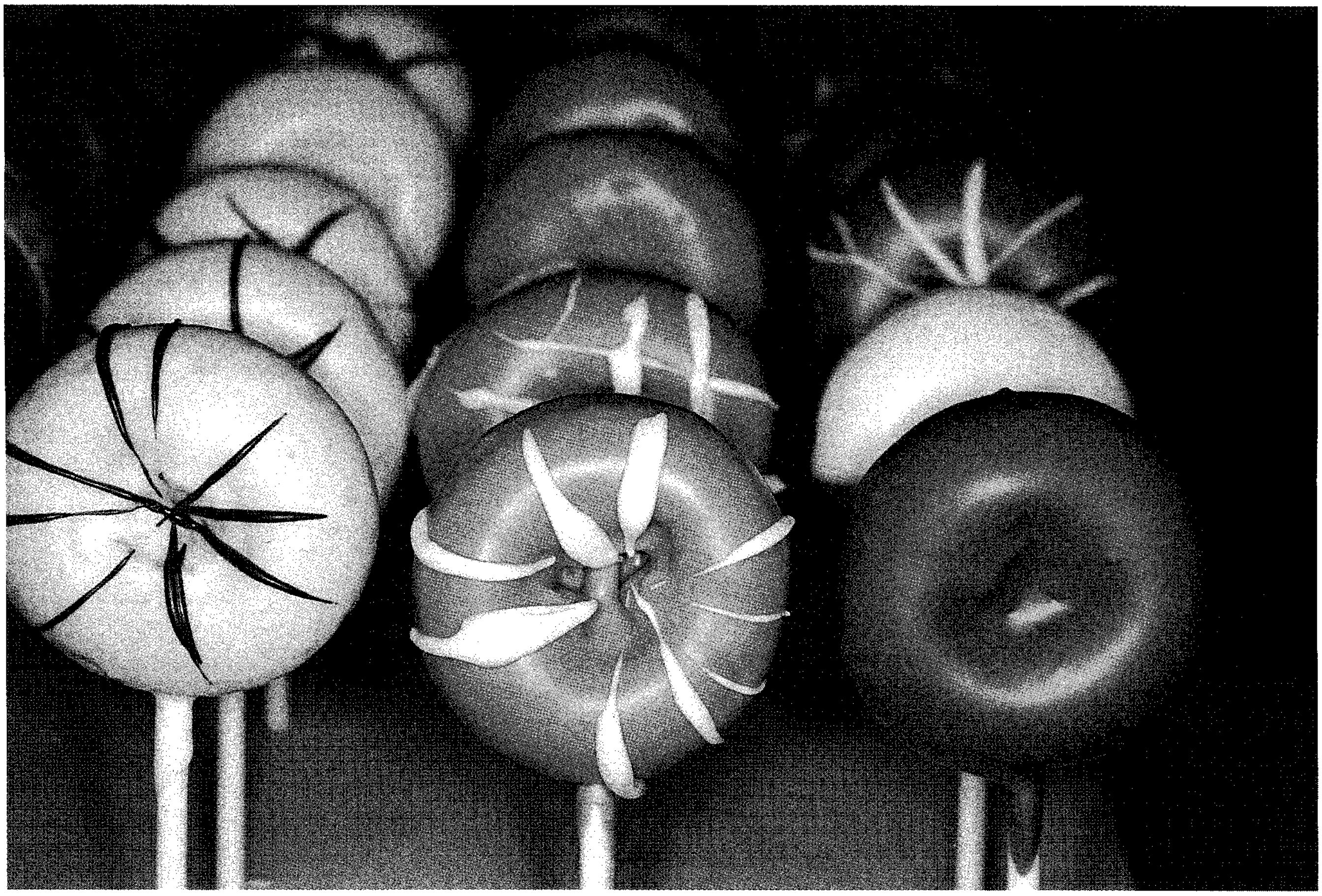


"He's the Tiger Woods of dodgeball."

FICTION

TOO SKINNY

BY TIM O'BRIEN



MARTIN PARR/MAGNUM

In March of 1988, Marv Bertel settled into the first rigorous diet of his life, nothing fancy, mostly water and will power. By early August of that year, he had shed forty-one pounds of lifelong flab. "Boy, I'm so incredibly, incredibly proud of you," his wife said, which in Marv's cluttered memory was the one and only time she had offered him praise of any sort. Two and a half months later, in mid-October, Marv reached his target of two hundred and twenty pounds, the least he had weighed since twelfth grade. That same morning, after a breakfast of salad greens and sparkling water, he celebrated by filing for divorce.

On the first day of November, Marv moved into a large furnished apartment just down the road from his mop-and-broom factory on the western outskirts of Denver. He purchased a new wardrobe, signed up at a tanning salon, installed an Exer-Bike in front of his TV, and, in an exploratory sort of way, began spending his evenings in a number of chic bars around town. Women took notice. Marv took heart. He was forty-one years old and ludicrously well off, even factoring in the pending divorce. To manufacture a high-end industrial mop cost just under a dollar and a half, the perfect broom substantially less. Dirt was forever, demand was steady. It was true, of course, that Marv had never found the business challenging, or even mildly interesting, but for a man who had spent a lifetime caught up in the sluggishness of gross obesity there was always the entrepreneurial virtue of sitting at a big rosewood desk for hour upon profitable hour, more or less motionless, more or less dead.

Now, though, Marv Bertel daydreamed. Infinite new futures appeared.

In bed at night, flexing his abdominal muscles to the irregular beat of his heart, he would picture himself on the cover of *Forbes:* capped teeth, an expensive haircut, maybe decked out in one of those fancy double-breasted suits that not so long ago had made him look like a giant Easter ham. He imagined producing a film or two, jetting off to Hollywood for dinner with the pretty people, showing up at a college reunion in the company of some wispy young starlet. No more blubber jokes. Just cheers and hugs and dietary inquiries.

Such thoughts inspired him. Impetuously, consulting only his own fantasies, Marv set a daunting new goal for himself, a hundred and ninety-nine pounds, and to his surprise he achieved it in just under two weeks.

A breeze, he decided. No reason to stop. He cut out his late-afternoon Martini, doubled his time on the Exer-Bike.

In the bathroom mirror, slowly at first, then rapidly, Marv's ribs began to surface like the skeleton of a sunken old galleon, ancient-looking, a little frightening. He dropped a full shoe size. Even his new wardrobe fit loosely. Equally dramatic, though at times more alarming, was the transformation in Marv Bertel's personality. From boyhood on, he had been a reserved, quiet-spoken individual, tentative and shy, a loner, but now he found himself passing along scraps of TV dialogue to his sleek young executive assistant, or telling jokes in elevators, or exchanging life stories with the young women he chatted up in local bars.

Often on these occasions Marv invented anecdotes befitting his slim new body—a robust detail here, a charming fib there.

At various times, in various night spots, he became a third-base coach for the Rockies, a plastic surgeon, a priest, a former priest, a scuba instructor, an ex-convict, a contortionist for Cirque du Soleil. To one young lady, an effervescent redhead of twenty-four, he claimed to be a retired rodeo cowboy. The following evening, in the same establishment but to a transfixed brunette, he omitted the word "retired," which worked wonders, and which he helped along with a little limp as he made his way toward the men's room. Remarkable, Marv observed, what spiced-up hogwash women would swallow from the physically fit. Almost anything.

He did not mention his mop-and-broom business; he avoided the inconvenient fact that his divorce was not yet final.

Granted, all this sometimes left him with a slight aftertaste of fraudulence, but still, given Marv's unhappy history, the tall tales appealed to his sense of humor, and even more to his sense of revenge. For as long as he could remember, he had been relentlessly teased and ridiculed and ignored, always the chubby sidekick, always the comic relief, and it gave him intense pleasure to behold the respect, even the awe, that spilled out like paint in the eyes of fetching young women half his age. He loved the artifice, the make-believe, the amazing power of a big bold lie. Also, he liked acting. Fantasy made him good at it. He underplayed his roles, reluctantly allowing pertinent misinformation to be pried piecemeal from tight, modest lips. And he went out of his way never to make advances. Even with the prettiest young lady, he was mercilessly polite, ruthlessly indifferent. He disregarded the occasional hand on his thigh. He feigned boredom. Eyes roaming, he would survey the barroom scenery as if in search of more deserving female companionship. And this, too, had the feel of revenge: payback to those legions of blind-eyed, fat-biased young women from his past.

Marv felt no guilt at all. And no remorse. On the contrary, there was nothing more satisfying than to hoist up his eyebrows as some buxom porker dipped into a bowl of guacamole or mixed nuts. Sometimes, depending on his mood, he would deliver a brisk, earnest discourse about the elements of responsible nutrition. Most often, though, he would issue a disgusted sigh and excuse himself and wander off to another table.

On the morning of December 4, 1988, Marv Bertel's bathroom scale registered just a hair under a hundred and ninety. He wept in the shower; he wept again as he towelled off. For the first time in almost three decades, Marv felt firmly and wholly human, a blessed buoyancy of body and soul.

That afternoon, on impulse, Marv hosted a boisterous office party—loud music, early bonuses—after which he invited his young executive assistant to join him for dinner at one of Denver's most upscale restaurants. She accepted, as the trim new Marv knew she would, and at seven o'clock they were led to a coveted corner table. The menu was northern Italian, tempting in the extreme. And so, too, was Marv's executive assistant, a dazzling twenty-six-year-old by the name of Sandra DiLeona.

Wisely, Marv seated himself out of harm's way, across the table from young Sandra. He did, however, order his first Martini in nearly two months, minus the olives, and within ten minutes called for another. It was the alcohol, almost without question, that soon inspired him to modify the seating plan. Marv moved to Sandra's immediate right, loosened his tie, and leaned toward the young woman with mischief in mind. Intimately, in a low, already slurred voice, he confided that there was a matter he wished to discuss with her. "A personal item," he said. "It's ticklish."

Sandra's eyes narrowed. She was a business-school graduate, chilly by disposition, nothing if not canny. "Personal?" she said. "What would that be?"

Marv had no idea. He was playing this by ear, adjusting to the harmonics of the moment.

"Ticklish," he repeated, and then glanced around the restaurant as if to be sure no one was listening in. He flexed his biceps, sucked in his stomach. "The fact is, I'm not sure where to start. A confession, I suppose. You've worked for me—what?—almost a year now?"

"Ten months," said Sandra.

"Right, ten months," Marv said. "And you know me strictly as a boss. A mentor." He hesitated. "I've made a favorable impression, I hope?"

"Sure, just fine," she said.

"And you're happy?"

"Happy?"

"With me. Your job."

"Well, I guess," Sandra said. "I've got ambitions, though. It's not like I dream about mops at night."

Marv chuckled. "Of course not. But you're satisfied with—you know—with the salary, working conditions, all that?"

Sandra said nothing. Her shrewd blue eyes conveyed a mix of puzzlement and suspicion. Marv gazed straight back at her. She was a tall, slim, masterfully assembled blonde. Five-ten, Marv estimated. Not an ounce over a hundred and forty pounds. Cover-girl complexion. Pouty lips. A few months back, in his fat days, he had paid almost no attention to the girl; no point: she had seemed beyond reach, as icy and unobtainable as Neptune. Now things were different. Bravely, with the inflated confidence that accompanies a shrunken belly, Marv took her hand and said, "Anyway, a confession. Here goes. I'm not just a mopmaker, I've also tried my hand at . . . Wow, I'm really not sure how to say this."

In truth, he was equally unsure about what to say. He thought fast, reviewing options, but in the end he did not think nearly fast enough. For the remainder of Marv's life, he would regret his next utterance. It came to him exactly as all the other barroom lies had come, out of the old fatness, the new thinness—all those deferred dreams and a job he hated and a stale marriage and a lifetime of mockery and humiliation and a craving for something better. Even as he spoke, Marv realized it was a mistake. He tried to stop. He put a hand to his throat, squeezed his eyes shut. *Don't*, he thought, but his tongue kept moving. Four syllables. Three words—"I'm an author"—that would cost him dearly: panic attacks, sleepless nights, heart trouble, endless shame, endless rationalizations, another miserable marriage. Vaguely, at least, he apprehended all this—not the details, of course, but the general appalling drift—and yet still he could not stop. In the years ahead, Marv Bertel would reflect upon this instant with the same self-loathing and self-pity that a lung-cancer victim must feel at the memory of his first cigarette.

"Author?" said Sandra. "Dabbling, you mean? Like a hobby?"

A door swung open.

Right then, for a miraculous split second, Marv had a last opportunity to rescue himself. He could have nodded and said, "Sure, a hobby," or he could have shrugged and smiled and said nothing. He could have been enigmatic. He could have feigned modesty. Again, for the rest of his days he would be haunted by these options. But the disbelief on Sandra's face—the contemptuous slur of the word "dabbling"—made him stiffen and take his hand from his throat.

"No," he said coldly. "A real writer. Fiction."

Sandra studied him for several seconds. What was happening behind her crafty blue eyes Marv could only estimate. A number of minute calculations, obviously. Certain prospects and possibilities tempered by a healthy dose of M.B.A. skepticism.

"So you've published?" the young woman said.

"Certainly. That's what we're discussing here."

"But I've never—you know—I've never even heard of you. Author-wise."

"No, dear, of course you haven't," he said. "Which is exactly why I bring it up." Marv finished his drink, squeezed the glass, smiled at her. He was committed now. "You've heard of pseudonyms? Very common practice, actually."

"Yes, I'm sure," Sandra said. "What is it?"

"What's what?"

"The pseudonym," she said.

Swiftly, Marv flipped through an internal card catalogue. Only the most ridiculous possibilities occurred to him, brand-name writers whose faces she would surely recognize from magazines or television. He began to shrug—to laugh it off as a bit of pre-dinner fun—when he heard himself utter the name of an accomplished, highly regarded, largely unread, obsessively reclusive literary figure. Here, he knew, was the point of no return.

"Thomas Pierce?" Sandra said. "That's you?"

A muscle at Marv's eye twitched. "Impressive," he said. "I'll be honest, I'm surprised you're familiar with him. With me. Very pleasantly surprised."

"Well, why not? I mean, God, he's one of . . . *You're* one of our great, great, great writers."

"You've read the books?"

Sandra wagged her head. "Of course not. Nobody does—that's not the point. You're famous. Everybody knows *about* you."

"Not everybody," Marv said modestly.

"Well, no, not compared to—you know—not like a movie star or something. Even so . . ." She stopped and chewed on her lower lip for a few seconds. The skepticism began flooding back into her sharp blue eyes. "O.K., so you're Thomas Pierce, that's amazing. But I don't see how it's a confession."

Marv did not, either.

He took out a handkerchief, wiped

"His tail has stopped wagging."

his forehead, and called for another Martini. His thoughts were oddly divided. In part, he wanted nothing more than to slither through some convenient loophole in the lie. At the same time, inexplicably, he felt an almost ferocious desire to press the issue, to make her believe, even to make himself believe. The years of fat-boy mediocrity had somehow warped his common sense. Clearly, he told himself, there was no way he could get away with this—not a chance—and yet something pathological egged him on. Morbid curiosity, maybe. Certain secret longings. The truth, after all, was that he could have been a writer. He should have been. He loved words, the sounds and syllables. Back in college, Marv had majored in journalism; he'd edited both the yearbook and the Darton Hall newspaper. Even after graduating, over the next several years, he had often pictured himself heading for New York, hanging out in coffee shops with a notebook and some pencils and perhaps a ravishing young editor or two.

Mops and brooms had put an end to it. Inertia, too, plus a cumbrous marriage and the burdens of obesity.

Now, staring into his empty glass, Marv took a few moments to gather himself. "I'm sorry," he said, "you were asking—?"

"The confession stuff," said Sandra.

"Right, of course. Misleading, I'm afraid. What I meant was . . . It's a bit embarrassing, really . . . Now that I'm unattached, nearly divorced . . . Well, I just needed to open up and share the secret. A friendly ear. Someone to listen."

Sandra thought about it for a moment. "But why me? I'm an executive assistant."

Marv smiled, reached out, and took her hand.

"Very true," he said adroitly. "And therein lies my confession."

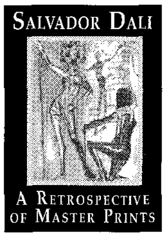
"You mean—?"

"For ten infatuated months."

Marv broke his own rule that evening. Not only did he make unambiguous advances toward the starstruck young lady, but he also went home with her, and to bed, under what even he recognized as false pretenses. Worse yet, Marv fell in love, or imagined he did. True, it was not the dry-mouthed, head-over-heels love of his youth. At best, Marv decided, it was the sort of love that visits a man who has recently shed nearly a third of his body weight, whose divorce is six weeks from final, and whose last sexual encounter had resulted in severe fibrillation and little else.

He slept with Sandra again the following night, and then every night for the next two months. In most respects, the affair was thrilling. Flattering, too: the way she looked at him with deference and delight and sometimes outright veneration. He liked the girl's intelligence, her bedroom professionalism, even her calculating, what's-in-it-for-me posture toward the world. She had the body of a fashion model, the central nervous system of a Pentagon mainframe. For Marv, all this was new and exhilarating, but even so, at day's end, his thoughts were drenched in the purest terror. He couldn't sleep, couldn't think. As a literary alter ego, Thomas Pierce had been an unfortunate choice. The man was a hermit, true—aversion to cameras, aversion to people—but he was also a master of the written word, a linguistic wonder boy destined for Stockholm, and the enormity and gross stupidity of the fabrication made Marv's spine go cold. At random moments, he was paralyzed by shame, by the pending horror of discovery. And there was no escape. All day, Sandra sat at a huge operations desk just outside his office. At night, she lay beside him in bed, scanning one of Pierce's most abstruse novels, now and then looking up to inquire about a metaphor or some obscure scrap of language. Marv did what he could to deflect such questions. He would sigh, or shrug, and explain that literature was meant to be experienced, not explicated. Other times, he would roll over and feign sleep. Eyes closed, frozen stiff by his own foolishness, he'd listen to the whispery sound of pages being turned, of Sandra's breathing, and in those miserable moments he would count himself lucky for even the smallest blessings. Thomas Pierce, praise God, did not permit photographs on his books. Nor had Sandra yet inquired about such sticky issues as royalty statements or work in progress.

Still, the strain on Marv's constitution became incapacitating. By the turn of the year, he'd dropped another six pounds,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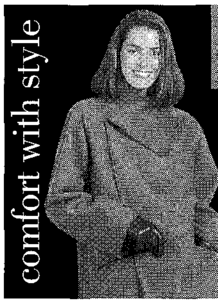

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tightened his belt a notch. In the office, behind a locked door, he spent his workdays trying to come up with some honorable solution. He considered firing the girl. He considered selling the factory, removing himself to Tasmania or Kuala Lumpur. The difficulty, though, was that Marv's heart was firmly engaged. Despite Sandra's flaws—especially that hard-edged, profit-and-loss shrewdness in her eyes—she was a living emblem of all those lovely young women who eight or nine months ago would not have given him the time of day. He did not want to lose her, or the idea of her.

In the end, therefore, Marv did nothing. He waited.

He envisioned miracles: nuclear holocaust, epidemic amnesia.

At the turn of the year, on January 1, 1989, Marv Bertel weighed in at a hundred and seventy-four pounds, which for a man standing six-three, with a heart condition and chronic insomnia, began to border on the unwholesome. Five days later, he was down to a hundred and seventy even. The diet, he knew, had little to do with it; fear alone was sucking the muscle from his bones. He had no appetite, no energy.

There were times now—numerous times—when Marv found himself looking back on his obesity as if recollecting a dear departed friend, a steadfast comrade who was always on hand with good cheer and a quart or two of premium ice cream. Not that Marv had been a happy man back then. Far from it. All the same, for better or for worse, he had managed to waddle through the world with at least the appearance of contentment and portly self-respect. He had gotten by. For forty-one years he had slept the sleep of the nearly innocent. Now, odd as it seemed, he could not help mourning the jolly old Marv.

These changes were nerve-racking. And there was also the deceit: it was eating him alive. In ways both physical and psychological, Marv had become a shadow of himself, and even that unfamiliar, shrunken shadow often terrified him. With each miserable day, he turned a little jumpier, a little more irritable, his stomach fluttering whenever Sandra entered a room or started to speak. Discovery was a certainty—a matter of when and where, never if—and yet Marv was still surprised, even shocked, when the inevitabilities finally tracked him down in early February. For several days, Sandra had become uncommonly quiet, stealing little glances at him, and at dinner one evening she put down her fork, wiped her mouth, and said, "Something's bothering me."

Marv closed his eyes. He knew more or less what was in store.

"I don't mean to pry," she said, "but I really, really have to ask this. You and me—us—it's a serious relationship, isn't it? I mean, this isn't some stupid office fling, we're a team, and we need to be open about everything."

"Open," Marv said. "Naturally."

"Right. And I feel . . . I get suspicious sometimes. I can't help it."

Marv looked away briefly, then looked back at her with hurt in his heart. It was completely genuine. For all his terror, all the sleepless nights, he was now struck by the indignation of a man not wholly trusted.

He glared at her.

"Look, I know it's not healthy," Sandra said quickly, "but I'm not used to putting much faith in people. Especially men. Older men. And that's important, isn't it? That's what makes a relationship tick." She averted her eyes. "So I've been thinking—and I don't mean this in a bad way—but the thing is, I mean, you're a writer, a famous writer, except you don't ever write."

Marv shrugged. "Don't I?" he murmured.

"Well, no. Do you?"

He gave the girl a cryptic frown, folded his napkin, leaned back, and lied. He informed her—with vehemence, voice quavering—that literature was not some seedy public sideshow, that it was pursued in absolute artistic solitude, paragraph by paragraph, syllable by syllable, and that in point of fact he slaved over his work every day, every hour, every minute—in fact, every instant of every minute. "What else," he said sternly, "do you imagine I might be doing behind that locked office door? Computer games? Solitaire?"

"I didn't think—"

"Moreover," he said, "this isn't something a real writer talks about. We don't chat our books into oblivion, we don't broadcast creative news bulletins." His voice had sailed up an octave. Even as Marv spoke, elaborating on the general theme of privacy, it struck him that he meant every ardent word. He believed himself. As if under hypnosis, transfixed by a besieged, self-righteous passion, he talked about the incessant turmoil of any worthy writer, the uncertainties, the subjectivity, the failures of nerve and language, the strain of wrestling with Satan for a line or two of decent prose. He cited Conrad on the subject. He cited Baudelaire. "You of all people," Marv said, "should understand that literature bubbles through my blood. It's my oxygen, my heartbeat."

Sandra surveyed his face for a second. She backed off. "Fair enough," she said. "I mean, if you're actually writing, well, fine, I'm glad."

"Swell of you," Marv muttered, though his tone was begrudging and whiny. In part this was genuine. In much larger part, however, it was a mask for his amazement at how easy it had been, how swiftly she'd surrendered. Then again, he thought, who would not? The audacity of the lie—its scope and grandeur, its breathtaking magnitude—suddenly unnerved him. It was not, after all, as if he were claiming to be some backwater hack, some scribbling midlist nobody. He had appropriated genius. He had taken for his own an entire life's work, a couple of masterpieces, a way of thinking, a way of being, another man's energies and chemistry and fame and labor and God-given virtuosity.

The realization sickened him.

Something sour and deadly rose into his throat, like the taste of cancer, and at that instant Marv came within a single breath of disclosing everything. But also at that instant, across the table, Sandra gave her hair a little toss and said, "Problem is, I still don't get it."

"Get?" said Marv.

"Well, I'm an executive assistant," she said. "I see your mail, I take your calls, and there's never . . . never anything literary. It's all mops and brooms."

The impulse to confess evaporated, replaced by a kind of wounded fury. It was perverse, Marv knew, but some bullheaded aspect of his personality rebelled against such galling cynicism. For the next ten or fifteen minutes, he delivered a soliloquy about the role of literary agents, about anonymity, about direct

CELLULOID SOUNDS

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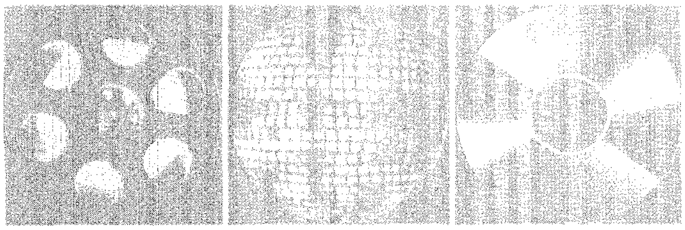

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SCHEDULE

DON'T LOOK BACK (1967)

D. A. Pennebaker's classic portrait of Bob Dylan on tour in 1965 England captures the folk bard just before his ascension from prophet to icon. Features numerous performances, including "The Times They Are a Changin' " and "Mr. Tambourine Man," along with appearances by Joan Baez and Donovan.

Monday, September 10 at 5:30 PM

LET'S SPEND THE NIGHT TOGETHER (1982)

This cinematic celebration of The Rolling Stones includes twenty-five songs recorded during their record-breaking 1981 tour. Concert footage was filmed in the Brendan Byrne Arena in East Rutherford, New Jersey, and Tempe, Arizona's Sun Devil Stadium.

Monday, September 10 at 7:45 PM

ROCKERS (1978)

When a reggae musician starts his own record company to liberate his colleagues from the control of a crooked label, the results are both exciting and dangerous. Even rawer than the reggae classic "The Harder They Come," the film features songs by Peter Tosh, Bunny Wailer, and Burning Spear.

Tuesday, September 11 at 5:30 PM

WATTSTAX (1973)

Isaac Hayes, The Staple Singers, Rufus Thomas, and others commemorate the five-year anniversary of the Watts riots with a performance in Los Angeles. This documentary mixes concert footage with social commentary on the black community and comedy from a young Richard Pryor.

Tuesday, September 11 at 7:45 PM

STOP MAKING SENSE (1984)

In this masterful concert film, Jonathan Demme captures the kinetic magic, eccentricity, and oversize suits evocative of The Talking Heads' storied three-day gig at Hollywood's Pantages Theatre in late 1983.

Wednesday, September 12 at 5:30 PM

PURPLE RAIN (1984)

This electrifying film début chronicles the story of The Kid, a struggling Minneapolis musician. Prince's Oscar-winning soundtrack reveals, among other things, exactly what it sounds like when doves cry, and Morris Day and the Time sparkle in their supporting roles.

Wednesday, September 12 at 7:45 PM

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bank deposits, about issues of seclusion and creative deck-clearing. There were people, he told her, to whom he paid a pretty penny to handle fan mail and contracts and all the other petty distractions. "I'm a language man," he said, a little too ferociously, "not a garbage man."

Sandra nodded, pushed to her feet, and without a word began clearing the table.

She was silent for the remainder of the evening. Several times, however, he caught her looking at him, biting her lip, and at one point he had the sensation of being studied as if through one-way glass, as if at a police lineup.

Marv mistook it for adulation. It was not.

In bed that night, lights out, she said, "I went on the Web today. Found a photograph."

"Did you?" Marv said.

"I did. An old one. It was pretty fuzzy, and I guess it was taken twenty-five, thirty years ago. But no resemblance. It wasn't you."

Marv heard himself chuckle. Not a single exculpatory thought occurred to him.

Dumbly, like dust, he was blown here and there by the jet stream of his own folly. He was no longer in the world. He was somewhere else. A trillion years ago, it seemed, this had all started as a way to get noticed, a way to *be* somebody, a sort of game, a pickup line, and now the convolutions had him tumbling in the dark. He chuckled again, but his eyes stung.

"If you think this is funny," Sandra said quietly, "you're a pitiful human being."

"Right," he said. "It's not funny."

"So explain."

Marv sat up in bed. Oddly, he was now very, very hungry. "Yes, why on earth not?" he murmured, and pinched the bridge of his nose. He swallowed hard. He yearned for a T-bone. After a moment, Marv took a breath and spoke slowly, painfully, but with immense valor. "The fact is," he said, "two of us write those books. I'm shy, he's not. What you saw was the other guy's picture."

"Other guy?"

Over the next twenty seconds, which had the half-life of plutonium, Marv unearthed a good many nuggets of wisdom. Most alarmingly this: There is no outer limit to mankind's credulity. Anything goes. The Easter Bunny. The indelibility of love. A god with white whiskers and a hearty laugh. Almost always, with only the most modest reservations, the human creature prefers an elusive miracle to an everyday lie.

Moreover, at the last minute, Marv blurted out a piece of dialogue worthy of Thomas Pierce himself, a stroke of genius that instantaneously bought him both trust and time.

"Will you marry me?" he said.

The victory, of course, was short-lived. There was a three-day eroticafest, with all its illusory distractions, after which Marv awoke to a headache and the knowledge that he had managed little more than to deepen his grave and dump in the worms.

It was true that Sandra's will to believe had temporarily short-circuited her common sense. But it was also true that for Marv the consequences and penalties had multiplied beyond measure. There was nothing droll about it. There was nothing cute, nothing clever. Each tick of the clock pumped poison through his veins. He couldn't sit still, couldn't read a newspaper or enjoy a simple bath. At night, when sleep finally came, his dreams were blistered by lurid cartoons of Judgment Day—truth cops with halos, heavenly polygraphs. His misery was absolute. Every chime of a doorbell, every beep of a horn carried the echo of a hangman's trapdoor. By daylight, in the mop factory, Marv's heart would snap at the sound of the girl's approaching footsteps. His breathing would go quick and shallow; his future would go void. There were times—many times—when he had trouble accepting the reality of his own monstrous fraud. It didn't seem possible. Until now, he'd had no idea that he was even remotely capable of such suicidal lunacy. A merry fat boy. A mop man. A pitiful, puffed-up yo-yo with a couple of secret chips on his shoulder. Nothing more.

In a sense, Marv thought, it was as if the diet had stripped away two hundred pounds of spiritual camouflage; what remained in his bathroom mirror was a ghoulish, unrecognizable bag of bones, a stranger who terrified and disgusted him.

Over the next few days, he dropped

another three pounds. Tufts of hair fell from his scalp. A pair of teeth loosened in his jaw. His appetite had returned—he was starving—but he couldn't make himself swallow. Each hour of his life, it now seemed, had the nap and weave of one of Thomas Pierce's most grotesque fictions, freakish and scary, ruled by entropy, a madhouse of make-believe looping back upon itself in infinite ellipses.

In the first week of March, on the day Marv's divorce came through, Sandra mailed out a thick stack of engagement announcements. "I have friends, I have a family," she said. "Why keep it a secret? Unless there's something to hide."

She squinted up at him, holding his gaze until he looked away.

For Marv, it was a hard moment.

"Nothing hidden in the least," he said. "Of course, I do hope you're not letting on about the Pierce business. That's sacred. That's holy."

"Understood," Sandra said. "Holy."

"A promise, then?"

"Sure. Not a peep."

Nonetheless, that very evening, Marv overheard fragments of a whispered, disturbingly boastful phone conversation in which Sandra flagrantly violated the spirit if not the letter of her pledge. Plain as day, he caught the phrase "literary bigwig"; also the words "stupid recluse."

When the girl hung up, Marv instantly confronted her. "That," he said crossly, "was a peep. A complete fucking squawk."

"Look, I'm proud of you," she said. "I want people—"

Marv waved a hand. "What happened to holy? You flat-out *lied* to me—a blatant, transparent, point-blank lie—and don't you ever, ever forget it."

"And what does that mean?" said Sandra.

"It means," he said gamely, "squawk, squawk."

He said nothing else.

The best defense, Marv had come to understand, was a thermonuclear offense, followed if necessary by immediate and unconditional surrender. The end of the road, he realized. No more.

He grunted, spun on his heel, moved briskly to the refrigerator, and wolfed down his first full pint of ice cream in nearly a year. His appetite was huge. He could eat again. It was a kind of quittance, to be sure, but it was also a joy. Already, ounce by ounce, he could feel the ice cream converting itself into the old Marv, maybe bigger, maybe better. Before retiring that night, he consumed a can of unheated baked beans, a Key-lime pie, a lamb chop, a pear, a jar of chutney, and two or three fistfuls of chopped walnuts.

In bed, after he'd lost a portion of his snack to the toilet, Sandra said, "You're not Thomas Pierce, are you?"

"I am not."

"Not a writer at all?"

"No," he said. "But I'm skinny."

They married anyway. There were terms, however: a cash stipend, separate bedrooms, a half interest in the factory, an ironclad will. "If you ever cross me, if you ever irritate me," Sandra announced on the eve of their wedding, "the whole world finds out what a creepy, contemptible liar you are."

"We could call it off," Marv suggested. "The wedding, the honeymoon."

"Now that," Sandra told him with a glare, "is what I mean by 'irritate.' "

Her M.B.A. training had come to bear. She was already in possession of the family checkbooks and an altogether rigorous prenuptial agreement.

By and large, Marv had no quarrel with any of this. He deserved his punishment. He'd been expecting it, even craving it, although perhaps not the life sentence that had been handed down. Still, as in anything, the pluses and minuses balanced out. All said and done, he had secured the glossy veneer of the wife he'd always wanted. He had visiting privileges. He had regular, if severely restricted, conjugal rights. There were times, in fact, as he lunched on brisket or supped on a soufflé, when Marv found himself positively swollen with admiration for his bride-to-be; more important, there was never a time when he did not wholly respect her. In the end, Marv reasoned, he'd had the amazing good fortune to bump into a woman who could appreciate a straightforward lie or two, who could give credit where credit was due, and who could without compunction return tit for tat. Under her hardheaded leadership, the mop-

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and-broom enterprise would surely flourish.

Also, of course, there were liabilities. On the debit side of life's forthcoming ledger, Sandra had imposed the condition that he remain forever Thomas Pierce, literary loner, evasive man of letters. "I've told my mom and dad, both my sisters, my friends, my masseuse," she said. "There's a price. If I have to live a lie, then so do you." She gave him a warning frown, allowed the coming decades to take traction in his soul, and then primly kissed his forehead.

"And by the way," she said, "stop eating."

The ceremony, like the bride, was expensive and lovely and thoroughly businesslike. A sunlit day in June. An outdoor wedding. Three hundred guests, all but twelve known only to Sandra.

Blackmail aside, conscience and wisdom long abandoned, Marv made the best of it. The champagne helped, as did several slices of a superb rum-and-chocolate wedding cake, and after some bleak moments Marv offered up a congratulatory shrug to fate and began to bask in the bright side, most especially the chance to reprise the much rehearsed literary role of Thomas Pierce. His performance, he judged, was so-so. Properly mysterious, adequately pompous. He took pleasure in the autograph requests, the hushed greetings from longtime fans. One of Sandra's teenage nieces, who came equipped with a suggestive smile and largely bared breasts, represented the day's high-water mark: all the signs of a groupie in the making. She gawked. She fed him oysters. At one point, when the girl's zealous tongue slipped into his ear, it occurred to Marv that to every dutiful husband came the annual chores and responsibilities of the family reunion. And it also struck him, as the admiring in-law's breasts opened up to take the curve of his belly, that this unlikely marriage, conceived in Hell, might well prove enduring.

As for Sandra, she was radiant.

During the toasts, Marv's new bride tapped his nose with five carats of compressed carbon. "If you put the scam on that bitch-niece of mine ever again," she said gently, almost with compassion, "you're just a dirt-poor ex."

They honeymooned in the Alps. Resolutely, with exhausting self-discipline, Marv worked his way through the sauces of Switzerland, France, and northern Italy. Sandra shopped. In early July, when they landed in Denver, Marv stepped on a baggage scale, waited for the needle to settle, and then sighed with the satisfaction of a man who after a long, fugitive absence had finally worked his way home. Or almost home. The sober truth, he perceived, was that his fling with fantasy had put a seal on his life. Except for mere flesh, which might well compound itself even in the grave, he had come to the dead end of things. Which was partly sad, partly happy. For all those ravenous decades, Marv had been governed by gluttony, not solely of the stomach but even more of hope, a hunger for all that he was not, all that he would never be, a hunger of dream and vision, a rapacious and bottomless and ultimately fatal appetite for an ever-elusive otherness. He had squired fantasy to the dance. He had left alone.

With that ended, and with Sandra now calling the mop-and-broom shots, Marv settled into what remained. He took solitary lunches. He feasted—though without the old pleasure—on almost anything that presented itself. As before, he waddled through. He had made his own bed; he slept in it. And at the first impossible whisper of reverie, even the most banal little aspiration for himself, he would switch it off as if it were some rigged TV game show that had never paid a winner.

A languid life, yes. And mostly pointless. But not entirely unsatisfying.

To pass the days, Marv sometimes locked his office door, put the intercom on mute, and jotted down memories of his encounter with skinniness. Not for public print, of course. He had learned his lesson. Still, he had fun with sentences. He changed a few names, his own included, and chuckled over delicacies of motive and meaning. He invented some things. He enlarged upon others. It became in the end a sort of romance, and he a writer, as if by doing that he could undo a lie, dissolve the fiction of his own fucked-up life. ♦

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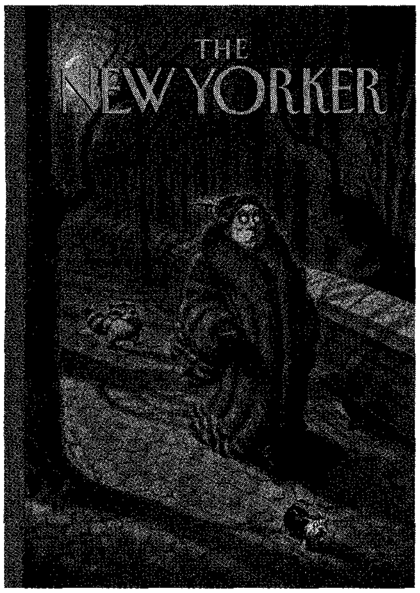

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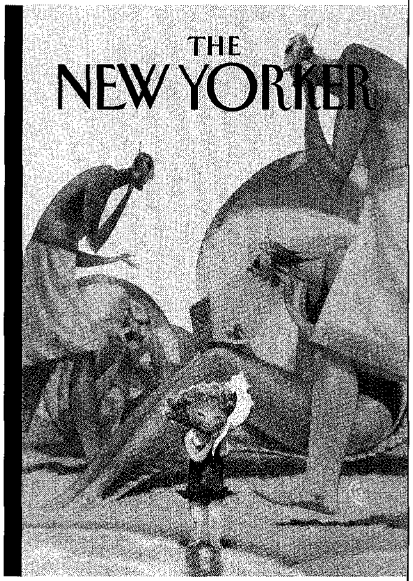

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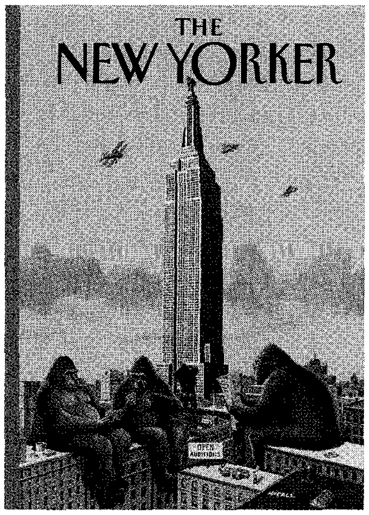

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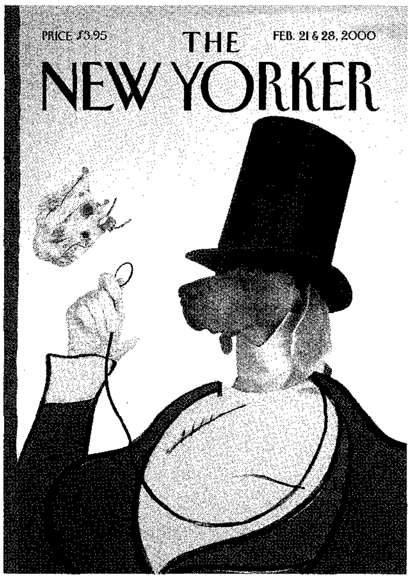

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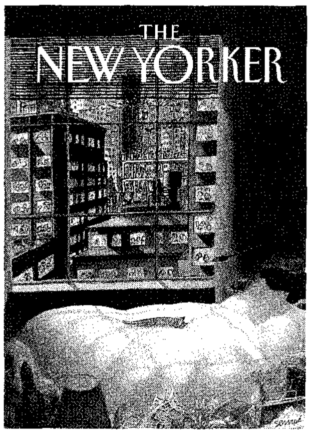

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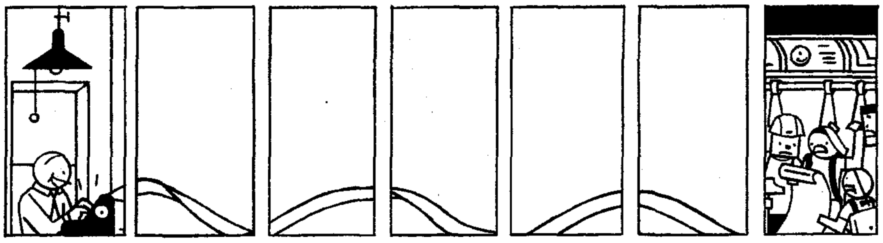


THE THEATRE

TEXAS BITTERSWEET

Horton Foote's homage to "The Three Sisters."

BY JOHN LAHR

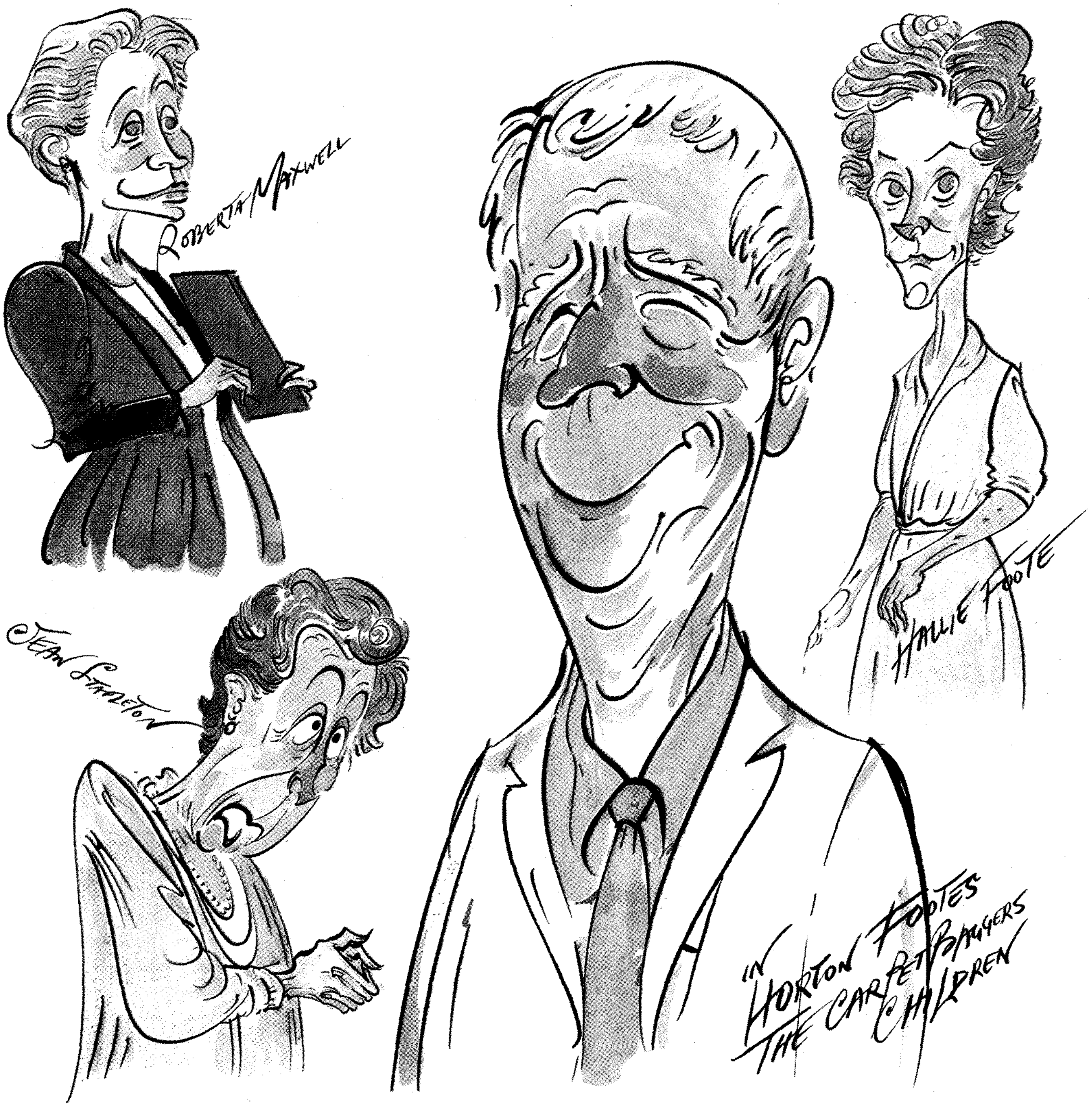
Horton Foote's "The Carpetbagger's Children" could have been the first play in the history of American theatre to have its world première underwater. Tropical Storm Allison, which flooded downtown Houston last June, managed to swamp the Alley Theatre up to the back row, so Foote's play, an homage to Chekhov's "The Three Sisters," was moved to the higher ground of the Stages Repertory. There, three expert actresses—Roberta Maxwell, Jean Stapleton, and Foote's daughter Hallie—wove an elegant family tale, and in the process chronicled Central Texas history from the Confederacy to the present. The play, which is about the gallantry and failures of life's journey, has itself since journeyed from Houston to the Guthrie Theatre, in Minneapolis, and moves this week to Connecticut's Hartford Stage, where it will run, under the crisp direction of Michael Wilson, until September 20th.

On the humid Houston night that I saw the play, Foote, who is eighty-five and brushes his white hair forward in Ciceronian fashion, was in attendance. The audience applauded as he took his front-row seat, and well it should. For more than sixty years, Foote, who was born and still lives part of the time in Wharton, Texas, has used his gentle, penetrating intelligence to bear witness to the vagaries of local life. His work has earned him two Academy Awards ("Tender Mercies" and "To Kill a Mockingbird") and a Pulitzer Prize ("The Young Man from Atlanta"). Both in person and as a storyteller, he has the limpid and melancholy humor of a man who has lived a long time and seen some things.

History is fable agreed upon; Foote demonstrates this with the three Thompson sisters—Cornelia (the matriarch), Grace Anne (the black sheep), and Sissie (the saint)—who have inherited the twenty thousand acres their Yankee father acquired after the Civil War. (Their ne'er-do-well brother, who has a sweet tooth for black women, has an equal share of the estate; but, in addition to failing at every business venture he tries, he also seems to have failed to earn a Christian name from the family, to whom he is always "Brother.") In the daughters' disagreement over how, exactly, their father originally came by his property, the dutiful Cornelia gives the official family line: after the war, Papa served as county treasurer and tax collector and was therefore the first to know which locals couldn't pay their taxes. "He would go to them and if they were about to walk away from the land would offer them some money and be able to take legal possession of their land," she says. Later, Grace Anne reports the townspeople's more mischievous version of events: "He was sent here as a part of the Reconstruction when the Yankees took over the county and the courthouse and got himself appointed country treasurer and tax collector, and when the plantations were breaking up and people couldn't pay their taxes, he grabbed land right and left and held on to it."

The Texas landscape—in its abundance and its barbarity—is the unnamed and defining source of the women's optimism, rapacity, and loyalty. It is the root of identity, envy, destiny, and confusion, as it is transformed first by the breakup of the plantations, then by the cotton gin, and finally by urban sprawl. Almost without our realizing his intention, Foote manages to capture, as well, the caprice of time—which is marked by music both at the end of the play (with the hymn "O, the Clanging Bells of Time") and at the beginning, when the distant sound of a sprightly fiddle invokes the memory of the family's favorite child, Beth, who loved to dance and who died young. The play is a haunting, and Beth embodies it. "When Beth was sick and we brought her home to die the men in the town covered the street with straw so there'd be no noise when the wagons and the horses went by," Cornelia says. With the sound of highway traffic reverberating around her, she adds, "I wonder what they would have to do now to stop the noise." Always pragmatic, Cornelia, who took Beth's place at the top of the family tree and never learned to dance, convenes this séance with the past. Well played by Roberta Maxwell in sensible black shoes, she oversees her father's business interests and is trapped by them. In the family house, she cares for her now demented mother, who spits at her daughter when Cornelia finds her father's military outfit in the attic and informs her that he was only a private in the Union Army, and not, as the mother fondly believes, a general. During the course of the play, Cornelia's heart seems to harden, and she cuts a tough deal with Grace Anne only to be jilted herself.

As it turns out, Grace Anne, who eloped and was summarily disinherited by her father in life—and then, by selling her parcel of land, transgresses against her father in death—is the only sister who appears to have found love. With her lapdog look and her rickety voice, Jean Stapleton gives Grace Anne's story droll and vivid life. She winkles out the feisty independence



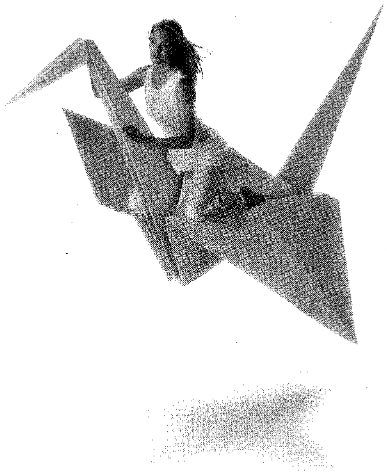
"The Carpetbagger's Children" owes as much to the West's tradition of the tall tale as it does to Western drama.

GERALD SCARFE

and the humor in Foote's low-key prose, expertly conjuring a picture of her mother—a few sandwiches short of a picnic—as she mistakes her long-absent daughter for a local jezebel and screams, "Get her out of here, I know what she's come for. She's trying to trap Brother into marrying her, just like the rest of the women in this town." "I wanted to say, Mama, you're wasting your breath because Brother has never been interested in white women," Grace Anne recalls.

If Grace Anne is a fighter, Sissie (Hallie Foote) is, by her own admission, a hider. "I always liked being the baby," she says. "I liked being told what to do, and what not to do, what to think and what not to think." Sissie is that familiar Texas specimen, the positive thinker. She never questions. She puts on a happy face. "She had such a sad life, so different from mine," Sissie says of a cousin, and yet she can't see the sadness of her own emotional mistreatment and accommodations. Sissie could never bring herself to move away from her father's land and join her husband in Houston. "I'd miss my family," she explains. Instead, she stays in the country, and her husband visits her "every other weekend." "And so I keep happy and whenever I get discouraged I just sing to myself one of the songs I used to sing in Sunday school," she says, and then sings "Brighten the Corner Where You Are." As Sissie, Hallie Foote is a kind of ringer in the proceedings; her father's ear for dialogue is pitched exactly to her flat, nasal twang, which catches both the music and the vacancy in his writing.

"The Carpetbagger's Children" is without incident and very nearly with-



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out interaction. Yet, in its modest, garrulous way, it is theatrically daring. It seems to owe as much to the West's tradition of the tall tale as it does to Western drama. It certainly defies Lahr's First Law of Theatre, which clearly states that if you can shut your eyes and still understand the play, then it is not a good play. Unlike Chekhov's "The Three Sisters," these siblings speak almost exclusively to the audience, and Foote's narrative is entirely exposition. Theatre is a game of show-and-tell, not tell and tell and tell, and by all conventional standards of stagecraft "The Carpetbagger's Children" should not work. But, thanks both to the actresses' charisma and to the fine filigree of Foote's storytelling, it does. Each somewhat unreliable narrator makes a plausible case for herself, and the recapitulated family legends gradually tease the audience into the small-town atmosphere, compelling it to make order, and therefore irony, out of conflicting anecdote. Foote, like Chekhov, refuses to explain his characters or to pick favorites. You have to listen up and listen hard and, as in needlepoint, weave a pattern out of the skein of yarns.

On the page, it's hard to convey the bittersweet music—the rhapsody of ambivalence—that Foote expresses through these narratives of joy and hurt. "For all the terrible things people are given to face, and even though some go under, you also find there are those who just carry on and somehow make sense of it all," he said recently. He added, "I've grown so fascinated in how things evolve that I can't be very sad for long." "The Carpetbagger's Children" embraces the knotty contradictions of both place and personality with much the same sense of blessing as did the English poet George Herbert, who wrote (though not of Central Texas): "I will complain, yet praise; / I will bewail, approve; / And all my sour-sweet days / I will lament and love." ♦

CONSTABULARY NOTES FROM ALL OVER
From the Lexington (Mass.) Minuteman.

When police responded to a 10:45 p.m. disturbance at Domino's Pizza on Massachusetts Avenue Tuesday, Sept. 29, they dispersed kids who were arguing over whose mother wore combat boots.

A CRITIC AT LARGE

LIGHTS! CAMERA! RAPTURE!

The Christian thriller heads for the cineplex.

BY SCOTT SPENCER

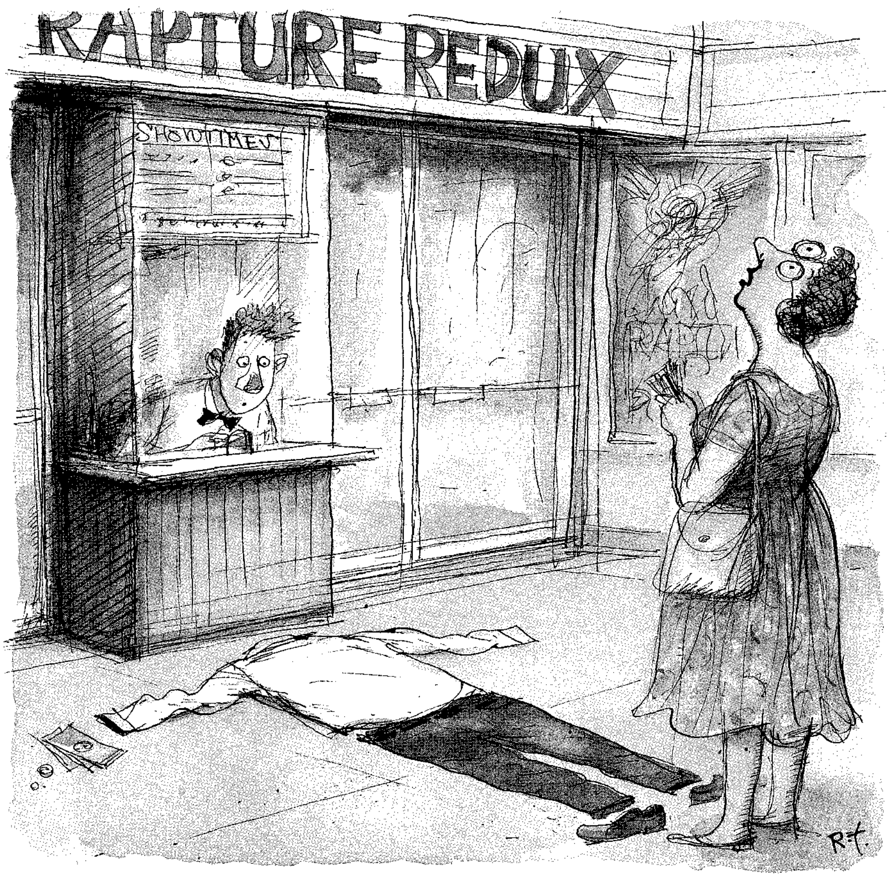
The camera barely moves while an American reporter and an Israeli general, in a desert encampment, argue about the possible end of the world. Hostile armies from all over the Middle East are closing in. The general, pie-faced, a little sweaty, but obviously sincere, says, "This is our land. It's all we've got. There is no other safe place for the Jew. Wherever we have gone for two thousand years, we have been hated."

Shots of marching armies, advancing tanks, helicopters, and aircraft carriers are intercut with video of Pentagon spokesmen, U.N. delegates, and a mysterious self-appointed savior of the world. Poison gas rolls across the Israeli countryside. Nuclear missiles are bound for the United States.

Reporting on all this from Los Angeles, a TV newsman tells his viewers, "The best thing we could have done would be perhaps to go home, say goodbye, and perhaps—oh my God! Charlie? Charlie!" After a moment, the reporter explains, "My cameraman just disappeared right in front of me." All over town, people have suddenly vanished, leaving behind the clothes they were wearing, their wedding rings. Cars, bereft of their drivers, careen out of control. A mother rushes into closeup, hysterical: "Someone took my baby!" Every true Christian has been raptured up to Heaven and saved from the suffering that's about to rain down on earth. A hundred and eighty-seven million people have gone to their salvation, and we are only some twenty minutes into "Apocalypse," a 1998 thriller that has been marketed almost exclusively through a Christian network of bookstores, radio stations, Web sites, and mailing lists.

RICHARD THOMPSON

Outside the familiar world of Hollywood premières and Academy Awards, there exists a small but growing movie business whose roots are deep in the Christian evangelical movement. In the past couple of years, the budgets of Christian films have reached seven and eight figures. As videotapes, they sell in the millions. And, increasingly, they feature actors who have successful mainstream movies on their résumés, actors like Louis Gossett, Jr., Michael York, Kirk Cameron, Gary Busey, Margot Kidder, and Mr. T, whose glory days may be behind them but who lend a cachet of celebrity to these projects.



The Book of Revelation provides the plot for a new wave of action-adventure films.

The recent growth of Christian filmmaking is a striking departure from the long-standing Christian quarrel with Hollywood. For much of the past century, religious leaders have railed against the untoward influence of cinema, threatening the studios with censorship boards and boycotts. Not long ago, Paul Crouch, the silver-haired founder and owner of the Trinity Broadcasting Network, the largest and most senior of the Christian TV empires, was fondly recalling one of the great Christian crusades against Hollywood. This happened back in 1988, when he and many thousands of other Christian protesters thronged the offices of Lew Wasserman, the chairman of MCA, which was about to release "The Last Temptation of Christ." Crouch said, "I never saw the picture, but I read the script, and it was blasphemous to the *n*th degree."

Crouch was seated in a TBN studio next to his son, Matt, a handsome young man with a brush cut and a dark suit. Matt has also put in time calling on the studios, but not with accusations of blasphemy or threats of boycotts; he's been coming with scripts, trying to interest executives in making "real Christian films."

Matt Crouch belongs to a new generation of Christian filmmakers, who see the Lew Wassermans of the world as potential business partners. "You want to know the Christians' biggest mistake?" Matt said later, from his office in Los

Angeles. "Not recognizing the neutrality of media. You don't like the movies they're showing downtown? Then make some of your own. You spend all your time preaching to the choir, it just gets incestuous. And you know what incest produces? Retards. For me, there came a time when I said to myself, 'Dang, I have to get outside of these four walls.'"

Matt Crouch went out on his own, confident that at least some of the several million people who watched his father's network would support a cinema grounded in the New Testament. Like any niche marketer, he has identified his audience. He knows where these people live, he has met them, he has listened to their complaints about the movies playing in the multiplexes. And, armed with that market savvy, he decided he was ready to make movies of his own. "Seems like I read somewhere, I think it was in Matthew, that Jesus went around telling stories," he says.

Hollywood had already proved that people will pay to see movies that make them laugh, cry, cringe, and swoon. But was there a story out there that would be both compelling to audiences and distinctively Christian? Not pageants about Jesus, not squeaky-clean movies that illustrate a scriptural tenet, such as fidelity or honesty, but something that people would actually enjoy. What do Christian filmmakers have to offer an audience other than the promise not to offend it?

Matt Crouch found the answer in the Book of Revelation, which has supplied him and others of his generation with a scenario so filled with terror and mystery that they can tell it over and over. It is the story of the moment when true Christians are raptured up to Heaven, and those who are left behind must contend not only with unprecedented natural disasters and attacks by demons but with the rule of Satan.

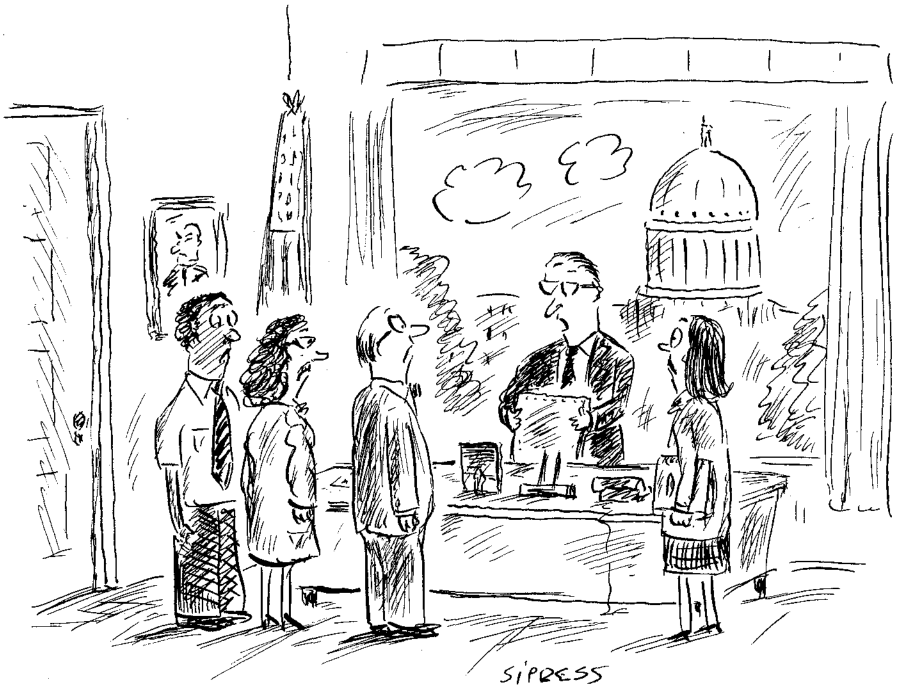
Until recently, the Book of Revelation fell outside the purview of most Biblical scholars. According to the Reverend Bruce Chilton, the author of "Rabbi Jesus," mainstream theology tended to marginalize Revelation, regarding it with a measure of embarrassment. Yet within the Christian community the book's emphasis on visions and apocalypse, along with the semi-vernacular diction in which it was composed, has made it a kind of People's Gospel. Revelation was fervently embraced by the peasant rebellions of the sixteenth century; it was studied and quoted by the Anabaptists, who found parallels between its descriptions of the despotic Antichrist and the various kings of Europe, and even the Pope. As Chilton put it, "It's a kind of folk poetry that appeals to people, even in our own time, who consider themselves oppressed, or forgotten."

This folk poetry undergirds "The Omega Code," which Matt Crouch's company, Gener8Xion Entertainment, produced in 1999. Like the Book of Revelation, "The Omega Code" depicts the rise of an Antichrist (played by Michael York). As in Revelation, Israel figures centrally in the story of "The Omega Code," which begins with the murder of a Jewish scholar who is working on deciphering the so-called Bible Code, that prophetic skip-code supposedly embedded in the Old Testament. It also features one of the Christian thriller's favorite characters, the media darling, in this case a charismatic motivational guru played by Casper Van Dien, the star of "Starship Troopers." Revelation, because it is a work of visions and takes place not in the past but in the future, is the one book in the Bible that can be interpreted in completely contemporary terms, without robes or donkeys; movies based on its apocalyptic warnings can make use of all the conventions of the modern action-adventure film.

Crouch had no intention of making a thriller that would be distributed only through his father's TV stations or the fundamentalist-Christian infrastructure of churches and bookstores. "The Omega Code" played in movie theatres, where it earned more money than any other film in limited release last year, including "Boys Don't Cry," "Buena Vista Social Club," "Sweet and Lowdown," and "The Cradle Will Rock."

The template for the apocalyptic Christian thriller was struck nearly thirty years ago, by a group of filmmakers in Iowa calling themselves Mark IV, who made a picture entitled "A Thief in the Night." Produced and directed by Donald W. Thompson, "Thief" has a humble, even scruffy look, not unlike the slasher and porn films of its time, full of zooms, jumpy edits, and "Caligari"-like angles. It begins with a young woman who wakes from a nightmare in a sweat as the radio brings news of a mass disappearance—millions of people all over the world have vanished. With horror-movie music on the soundtrack, the young woman screams for her husband and races to the bathroom, where the only evidence of him is the buzzing electric razor he has left in the sink.

From there, the movie dissolves to



"I've come to realize that I'm not a Republican or a Democrat. I'm bi."

flashback, and we find ourselves in a meeting of a church youth group, where some of the kids sing the movie's theme song, "I Wish We'd All Been Ready":

> Life was filled with guns and war
> And everyone got trampled on the floor
> I wish we'd all been ready.
> Children died, the days grew cold
> A piece of bread could buy a bag of gold . . .
> There's no time to change your mind
> The Son has come and you've been left
> behind.

The heroine, a Christian, but one who lacks a real commitment to Jesus, must make her way in a world that is controlled by an organization called UNITE. Seeking to make sense of what has happened and trying not to receive the UNITE tattoo—the mark of the beast—she turns to old friends, only to find them under UNITE's power. It's "Invasion of the Body Snatchers" with a Christian spin: the horror comes not from outer space but from our own corrupted souls.

A few years later, Thompson continued his narrative of post-Rapture America with another Mark IV production entitled "Image of the Beast," and here the spiritual violence of world government is augmented by real gore—beheading by guillotine (in a homey touch, the executioners slip a plastic laundry basket beneath their victims' heads before the blade falls). Like much outsider art, "Beast" celebrates an active resistance to authority. "We're opposing an ungodly regime," a Christian guerrilla fighter explains. "I'm going to do everything in my power to foul up this lousy system."

Another standard element in the genre is the man of God who finds that he has not been raptured up with the true Christians. In "Image of the Beast," he is a burly, bearded fellow who looks like a contemplative Hell's Angel, and who makes the movie's most complex scriptural points—specifically, what will happen between the Rapture and the Second Coming. A new leader, the Antichrist, will create an illusion of his own death and then stage a false resurrection, after which the Jews will proclaim him the new Messiah. God will send two prophets, or angels, to Jerusalem to convert the Jews, but the Antichrist will kill them. The Jews will then flee Jerusalem and suffer the most "wrenching persecution" of their long history, until "their groaning spirits will begin to realize that their true Messiah was crucified outside Jerusalem twenty centuries ago."

The conversion of the Jews is, in the lockstep eschatology of the Christian thriller, what the Rapture, the seven years of Tribulation, the rule of the Antichrist, and Jesus' Second Coming all lead to. As Peter Lalonde, who with his brother Paul is one of the most successful Christian filmmakers, has written, "Two thousand years ago, the nation of Israel rejected Jesus as He came down from the Mount of Olives. This time, Israel will receive Him as He once again stands on the very same mount."

The Lalondes, who have been called the De Milles of Christian cinema, run a company called Cloud Ten Pictures, based in St. Catherines, Ontario, just a few miles north of Niagara Falls. Their office building, in which they employ twenty-six people, has a reception area where you can peruse *Christianity Today* and *Ministries Today* alongside *Variety* and the *Hollywood Reporter.*

Peter Lalonde is a handsome man, with a smiling, untroubled face and a high scrubbed forehead, who speaks with the calm, amused bonhomie common to successful salesmen. Like the lairs of many movie executives, his presidential suite reflects his enthusiasms—a wooden Indian in one corner, a tank filled with tropical fish, a pool table, and childhood photos of him and Paul. Peter is so charming and pleasant that it's a little difficult to reconcile his personality with the stern, apocalyptic nature of his movies. Nevertheless, he does feel that the dire predictions he has found in his reading of Revelation may be coming true in our own time, particularly in the globalization of the world's political systems and media empires, and in the formation of the State of Israel.

After creating a Canadian Christian television show called "This Week in Bible Prophesy," the brothers began their career in feature films in 1998 with "Apocalypse." Written by the Lalondes, with the coöperation of the Jack Van Impe Ministries, "Apocalypse" is a low-budget affair shot directly onto video, and filled with scenes that are little more than talking heads advancing the plot.

The story line is the familiar, post-Rapture tale of what happens after the true Christians disappear from earth and the Antichrist proclaims himself the leader of a one-world government—O.N.E. (One Nation Earth). With spliced-in footage of crowds gathered at such recognizable locations as Central Park and Moscow, "Apocalypse" manages to generate a fair amount of energy, even though the participation of Jack Van Impe seems to have led to a number of scenes of Van Impe reading from and commenting on various Biblical prophecies; there are even closeups of a blue marker highlighting key scriptural passages.

"Apocalypse," which was distributed almost exclusively in Christian bookstores, sold more than three hundred thousand copies. The Lalondes used the money to produce their next movie, "Revelation," which they cast with mainstream actors, including Jeff Fahey and Carol Alt, and which they shot on 35-mm. film, giving it a much more professional look. "Revelation" is, in fact, part two of what they call the End Times series, a continuation of the story of the seven years between the disappearance of the Christians and the return of Christ. To direct the film, the Lalondes hired a young man named André van Heerden, who had begun working in their offices cataloguing videotape. "Revelation" was even more successful than "Apocalypse," and it wasn't long before the Lalondes had released a third End Times thriller, "Tribulation," featuring Gary Busey, Howie Mandell, and Margot Kidder, in which a police officer (Busey) awakens from a coma after an automobile accident to find himself in a godless world ruled by the Antichrist.

Cloud Ten's ability to attach recognizable names to its films grows with each budget, and the producers appreciate the importance of casting. "We realize we're not going to get Tom Cruise or Harrison Ford," Peter Lalonde said in his penthouse suite in downtown St. Catherines, "but everyone wants to work. I'll call anyone, I'll do any deal. We may not be in Los Angeles and in there with C.A.A. and I.C.M., but those people talk to each other and when our names come up someone's going to say, 'Hey, I had one of my clients in their picture. They paid well, they paid on

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time, and it was a good experience.' "

Plainly, for many it was. Gary Busey, an actor whose career has had a number of sharp dips, is passionate about his participation in Cloud Ten's pictures. "When I first read the script of 'Tribulation,' " Busey has said, "I cried tears of joy inside. I knew that God had prepared me through my entire acting career, and through the trials of my life, for the making of this very movie." Others are less enthusiastic. Margot Kidder, Busey's co-star in "Tribulation," says, "I was broke, and I said to my agent, 'Get me a job.' When I read the script, I thought it was this strange thriller. It really wasn't until I was on the set that I realized these guys were serious. You can't imagine my horror. You know, this is an acting trick, but when I play a baddie in a movie I usually wear a cross. That's what I think of organized religion. And now, since being in this movie, I keep getting fan letters from Christians, saying, 'We're glad you saw the light. Would you like to come speak at our church?' Before this, my fan base was mostly prisoners."

The Lalondes' 2000 release, "Left Behind," was based on a novel by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins that had sold millions of copies. For this project, Cloud Ten secured the services of two avowedly devout actors, Kirk Cameron and Chelsea Noble, who worked together on the successful TV series "Growing Pains" and are now husband and wife. The Lalondes also brought in an industry veteran to direct—Victor Sarin, whose credits include such movies as "The Legend of Gator Face."

Though it treads familiar ground for those who have seen other post-Rapture thrillers—the rise of a one-world government, the imperilment of Israel, the deception of world peace and prosperity—"Left Behind," on which Cloud Ten spent seventeen million dollars, looks strikingly professional. The sky darkens with scores of fighter jets on their way to bomb Israel. Bombs drop. Jets explode. Fires rage. The international locations are convincing. The music, created by artists from the Christian-rock movement, sounds like a gentle mix of Abba and Madonna, full of synthesizers and lyrics like "When it comes down / I've made up my mind / I know that I will not be left behind."

"Left Behind" was released on video in November, 2000. The following week, the top-twenty videotape sellers on the *Hollywood Reporter's* list were all distributed by Disney, Fox, Paramount, Columbia-TriStar, Dreamworks, Universal, or Warner, except for the No. 2 title, "Left Behind." And "Left Behind" continues to sell—nearly three million copies so far, with the bulk of those sales from "secular stores," like Wal-Mart. "We couldn't have been in the movie business ten years ago," Peter Lalonde told me. "We didn't have the technology to make movies inexpensively, and we didn't have the infrastructure to market and distribute our product."

Recently, Cloud Ten and the Lalondes put their infrastructure to the test. Though "Left Behind" had been selling for months on video, the Lalondes arranged for a theatrical release, on some seven hundred screens in the United States. Instead of the mainstream route of theatrical distribution, they relied on a far-flung network of "sponsors," mostly church groups, who contributed three thousand dollars apiece to cover the cost of a print and the advertising posters, and who then helped Cloud Ten secure bookings all over the country. Each sponsoring organization was also given fifteen hundred half-price admissions to the movie. "The very nature of the Christian community is to bring people with you," Peter Lalonde said. Cloud Ten organized thousands of fans of the movie to become "commandos," sending them to chat rooms and retail sites on the Internet to talk up the film and out into the real world to tack up posters and hand out leaflets. "We want 'Left Behind' to empower the audience, as well as other Christian filmmakers, and even Christians inside the studios," Lalonde added.

The reviews "Left Behind" received, on its theatrical release, were largely dismissive, even contemptuous. But, a week after its release, when I caught up with Paul Lalonde, he did not sound discouraged. Though "Left Behind" came in seventeenth its first weekend, Lalonde felt that he had scored a modest success. "And the movie's given the video new life," he added. "Sales are picking up all over."

Christian filmmakers, like their counterparts in the porn industry, are creating a product for an identifiable consumer group, and they enjoy a stable distribution and retail network that is willing and able to move this product. At the moment, millennial, post-apocalyptic fantasies seem to have energized the Christian movie and given it a chance to combine fear and trembling with special effects. Still, filmmakers cannot mine the Book of Revelation forever without making even the end of the world seem tedious. Sooner or later, the Christian thriller will have to find other stories with a contemporary flair. Meanwhile, the films continue to demonstrate that there is an audience out there, people who are willing to spend their hard-earned Christian dollars for the right sort of Christian movie. What's less clear is whether production companies like Cloud Ten and Gener8Xion can use their connection to this audience to join the mainstream. The Hollywood executives I've spoken with acknowledge that the audience for Christian cinema is sizable, but they are leery about trying to court it. "Frankly, these are people we seldom meet," a senior executive at a major studio told me. "And it's hard to create a product for people who vociferously disapprove of everything else you do. It would be like McDonald's trying to go for that fifteen per cent of the country who hate fast food. Sometimes you just have to let it go."

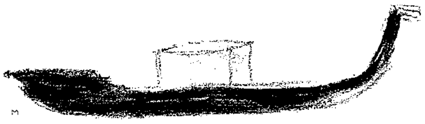
As for the Antichrist, we haven't heard the last of him. Not only does Cloud Ten have another of its End Times thrillers in production but soon Paul Crouch will be on the air praying for the success of his son's September 21st release, "Megiddo," which is both a prequel and a sequel to "The Omega Code." Directed by Brian Trenchard-Smith ("Happy Face Murders," "Atomic Dog," "Leprechaun 4"), and once more starring Michael York, "Megiddo" has a budget larger than anything Gener8Xion has yet dared. Its locations include Nairobi, Rome, Los Angeles, and, of course, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. In the words of Matt Crouch, "It begins with the Antichrist as a young child and follows him all the way to the field of Megiddo during the Battle of Armageddon." Just in case anyone gets the wrong idea, Crouch adds, "And, by the way, he loses." ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Pickup, *by Nadine Gordimer (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $24).* Gordimer's latest novel begins with a chance meeting in post-apartheid South Africa between Julie Summers, the daughter of a rich banker, and Abdu, an illegal immigrant who comes from a dirt-poor Arab nation. The relationship quickly develops into an affair, although one which is inevitably marked by pockets of secrecy and suspicion: she is white, he is not, and that is only the most superficial of their differences. While Julie can travel freely and traffic in ideas with a dilettante's enthusiasm, Abdu, on the brink of being deported, must be more careful. Gordimer plays the lovers off of one another expertly—Julie's self-confidence and Abdu's fragile optimism are like a melody and countermelody—and she explores the problems of dispossession with characteristic subtlety.

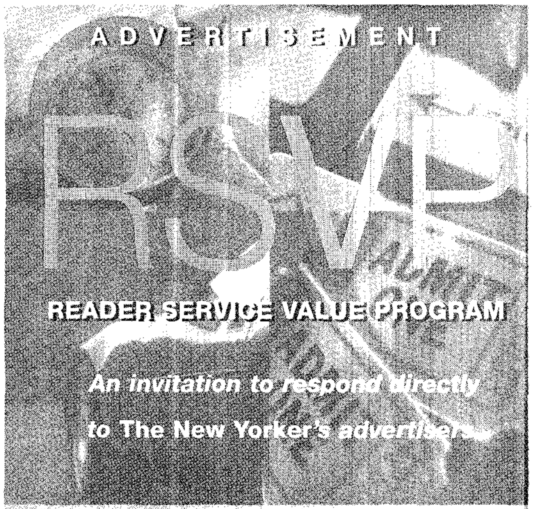
On the Night Plain, *by J. Robert Lennon (Holt; $23).* In the harsh world inhabited by the Persons, a family of sheepherders on the Great Plains after the Second World War, it is hard to tell where hard living ends and hard luck begins. One son is taken by illness, another in a shooting accident, a third by suicide; a fourth dies at sea, shipped off to war in his older brother's stead. The two surviving brothers try to outrun their fate but, finally, they can imagine no other. The considerable satisfactions of this story lie mostly in the skill of its telling. Lennon, whose last book was "The Funnies," is up to something different here: an austere meditation on physical labor, endurance, and the consolations—if any—of art in relation to such a life.

Eye of the Whale, *by Dick Russell (Simon & Schuster; $35).* This superb natural-history book, like its subject, is huge and appealing. In the days when the California gray whales were hunted to the edge of extinction, they earned a reputation for ferocity, but then—around the time that they became a protected species—they began approaching boats to play with the passengers. Gray whales travel close to shore, and Russell follows their migrations from Baja California to the top of the map and around to Siberia, talking along the way to scientists, sailors, and fishermen who share his excitement. The joy of the journey is shadowed only by continued threats to the species' survival.



Berlioz Remembered, *by Michael Rose (Faber & Faber; $20).* The nineteenth-century French composer Hector Berlioz was a study in extremes. An archetypal Romantic artist, he was a volcanic personality, an outlandish fop (his towering hairdo became the stuff of legend), and a musician of shockingly limited skills; he was also an excellent conductor and music critic, and a composer so daring and original that he revolutionized the sound of the modern orchestra. Rose sifts through the letters and memoirs of an astonishing range of personalities (from Wagner to the Goncourts to Queen Victoria), linking them with perceptive and witty commentary. Berlioz's music was widely ridiculed, and his life was full of misfortune; but Rose's love of a good story makes up for the book's many sad episodes.

Landscape with Chainsaw, *by James Lasdun (Norton; $21).* The poems in this collection accomplish an extraordinary deconstruction and reconstruction of landscapes, both natural and interior. At their center stands the poet, like a latter-day Everyman—part Thoreau, part Hendrix, part John Deere—wielding his axe against the recalcitrant forests of upstate New York. In this paradise crossed, with "knobbled trees still cranking out squint fruit," Eve's ambiguous gift to Adam is not an apple but a chain saw. Lasdun's clear-cutting takes in everything from Celan to Arthurian legend, laying bare the complexities of the poet's own background as an English Jew and his sense, expressed as "clean-etched, irreducible unillusion," of being forever a colonist or a refugee, never a native.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THE CURRENT CINEMA

FATHER FIGURES

Teen-agers looking for love.

BY ANTHONY LANE

It is not entirely clear what the viewing public has done to deserve such treatment, but this week sees the release of not one but two movies about child molestation. The children in question are all in their teens, and possessed of such ominous maturity that you don't really want to inquire how they came by it; nevertheless, there is no age limit to helplessness, and moviegoers could be forgiven for wanting to torch the screen or for simply staying away.

The annoying fact is that at least one of these films—Michael Cuesta's "L.I.E."—needs to be seen. The title is untroubled by yearning; there is no sense that the Long Island Expressway, unlike the Road to Samarkand, will guide you to a better place. (How unfortunate can an abbreviation be? You can almost smell the deceit, laid down like asphalt.) The people in the movie are fenced in by circumstance, or by their own peculiar needs: people such as the fifteen-year-old Howie (Paul Franklin Dano) and his best friend, Gary (Billy Kay), who are at least half in love with one another. They play truant, breaking into local houses and making off with personal possessions—valuables, invaluables, junk. It's an odd compunction, since Howie, in particular, is hardly deprived: a new iMac sits in a corner of his bedroom, and his dad, Marty (Bruce Altman), makes a killing in construction. Dig deeper, however, and you hit the deprivation; you learn that Howie's mother died a couple of years earlier in a car wreck on the L.I.E., that he still takes a sniff of her perfume and tries on her lipstick, and that his father has not only started seeing someone new but has stopped seeing, or wishing to see, the damage inflicted on his son.

From the start, you feel that nobody like Howie—innocence posing desperately as experience—can be wrought and tested like this without beginning to crack. And that's what happens: the boys steal a gun from the basement of an ex-marine named John Harrigan (Brian Cox) while he is hosting a birthday party overhead, and Harrigan comes looking for it, armed with a scrap of denim from Howie's jeans, which got ripped in the raid; the rip was an accident, but to watch Harrigan put the scrap to his nose and inhale you would think that it was a talisman dropped by the gods. The unnerving thing is that Harrigan seems already to know who Howie is and where to find him; at the local coffee shop, he slides into a booth opposite the boy and announces in sorrow that he was a friend of Howie's mother. Harrigan—or Big John, as he likes to be called—is a Vietnam vet, with thick white hair and hands like bear paws, and clothes as rumpled as his face. His warmth and wit are unfaked, as are the range and squalor of his corruption; when somebody tells him that he should be ashamed of himself, he simply replies, "I am."

It was bold of Brian Cox to take this part; most of his coevals would have run scared. Harrigan is a bad man, with terrible tastes to assuage; yet he is a living man, not a glaring cartoon or a trumped-up devil, and the force of that living, bulked out in brawny humor and soothed by a Celtic burr, compels us with the sort of ease that we tend to associate with the gregarious and the good. Cox has played King Lear onstage, but this new incarnation made me think of Falstaff—of one of the paths that Falstaff could have followed after his rejection by the court, his worship of the young Harry curdling into the sour lechery that sees a prince on every street. Big John: even the

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nickname has a tavern swagger to it, an air of brothers-in-arms.

Cox's presence is so large and looming that Michael Cuesta has to struggle to protect the rest of his picture, and to stop it from being swamped. Luckily, the other characters hold fast: Gary and Howie look itchy with irresolution and lust, and there's a fantastic performance by Big John's automobile, an orange-red Cutlass, idling like a tiger at the side of the road. In one shot, it circles an empty parking lot beside the sea—a brief, perfect splicing of desolation and fun. That, more or less, is the mix that "L.I.E." has to offer. Whenever the story throws up a major event, the film falters and draws back, as if in embarrassment; there are two deaths here, neither of which I found remotely convincing, and it seems unlikely that the F.B.I. would drag Howie's father away, on charges of faulty construction, without pausing to consider his child. On the other hand, when Cuesta narrows his gaze, the film opens up, brimming with a difficult tenderness; if he stumbles through the F.B.I. subplot, that is because he is eager to show us the fully orphaned Howie—motherless *and* fatherless, and thus easy meat for the ravenous Harrigan, who can play any parent he likes.

Some viewers will find what follows unwatchable, even though there isn't any sex. Big John has a pornographic chat with Howie early in the film, and then drops the subject, as if it were not a proper topic for gentlemen. From here on, he merely cares for him—taking the boy into his home, disdaining his goodnight kiss, and ordering him to put the milk back in the fridge. (The whole setup is like a pervert's rewrite of "The Kid," with Cox as a Chaplin gone to seed.) The maddening thing is that Harrigan gives the genuine impression of caring for his young charge; but is that not precisely the impression he *plans* to give, as a means of softening Howie's defenses? Are we, too, not being fooled by the classic tactic of the pedophile? If we were shown a rape, the film would coarsen into a cautionary tale. As it is, the worst we get is Harrigan giving Howie a shave, using a cutthroat razor. Even then, the camera is so intimately trapped in the trust of the moment, and the boy so plainly believes that he has, however fleetingly, found someone to love him, that, for once, the old saw of the censor—that a work of art may serve to harm or delude impressionable minds—doesn't seem so obtuse, and you could make a good liberal, rather than a conservatively irate, case for giving "L.I.E." its NC-17 rating. Maybe this is why Cuesta ends his movie so glumly, as if to shake himself out of his own dangerous dream; maybe that is why we head back to the expressway itself, with Harrigan cruising for rough trade. Under a dull sky, Big John dwindles into what we could, or should, have seen him as in the first place: a little creep. Between them, Cox and Cuesta leave you with a grating question: Can a movie be so good that it's bad for you?

Innocence poses desperately as experience in Michael Cuesta's "L.I.E."

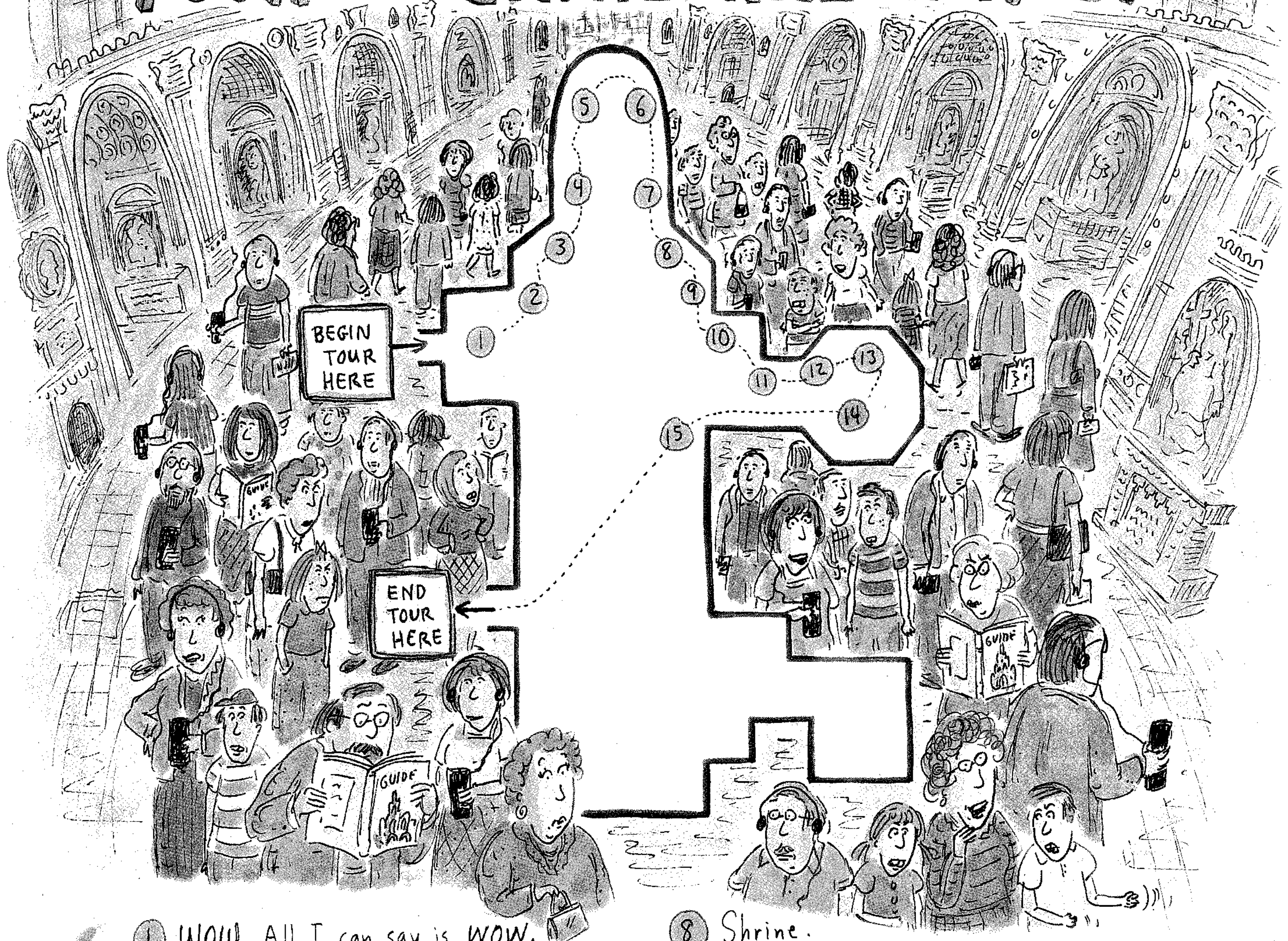
TOM BACHTELL

The director Barbet Schroeder has enjoyed a career of peripatetic kinkiness. To travel from the Gallic dominatrix scene of "Maîtresse" to the snickering, high-style nastiness of "Single White Female" and "Reversal of Fortune," and now to the hustlers and drug-hungry slaughters of Colombia is proof, at the very least, of a well-stamped passport. The new picture, "Our Lady of the Assassins," stars German Jaramillo as a gay, aging writer named Fernando, who returns to Medellín, the haven of his youth, in a weary quest for sex and death.

He takes up with the brooding young Alexis (Anderson Ballesteros), whose hobbies include heavy metal and random homicide. If Schroeder's portrait of Medellín is as accurate as one suspects, then Pablo Escobar and his kin did indeed reduce the city to a living death. Numbness is part of the deal, as Fernando himself becomes acclimatized to the suffering; the trouble is that Jaramillo lends minimal heft to the lead role, and his melancholy plays out as the moping of a sated hedonist. (Think what Cox, or even the Brando of old, could have done with this part; it's the kind of job that Brando might have taken just to freak out his agent.) Ballesteros, too, lacks both subtlety and fire, and you wonder what Fernando sees in this particular catamite. Yet, while "Our Lady of the Assassins" has none of the coilings and contradictions that mark the morality of "L.I.E.," it does boast one scene that Michael Cuesta cannot match. Fernando buys a box of doughnuts for a friend of Alexis, who then forces a bunch of mendicants to kneel down in the street and accept chunks from his hand. Without warning, the sequence has tipped into a parody of the Mass. But the sacrilege is not all scorn; although the boy may savor his cruel joke, he has undeniably put food into the mouths of the needy. In the midst of the vicious, there is a gleam of charity; and, in the midst of a feeble film, you feel a cool breath of cleverness, as if the ghost of Buñuel had passed by. ♦

THE BACK PAGE BY ROZ CHAST

TOUR OF CATHEDRAL #4,019



① *WOW*. All I can say is *WOW*.

② How did they build structures like this without modern machinery? It's *AMAZING!!!*

③ Look at that *beautiful stained glass!* I am in *AWE*.

④ The *bottom of my shoe* is actually touching a stone that somebody put here in maybe 1200 A.D.

⑤ Wish I hadn't worn these *specific* shoes, though. Oh, well.

⑥ This really is incredible.

⑦ How was *I* supposed to know that that old chair was part of the exhibit???

⑧ Shrine.

⑨ I *knew* when I wore these shoes that they were uncomfortable, but I wore them *anyway*. I *DESERVE* to suffer.

⑩ I think I'm getting hungry.

⑪ More stained glass.

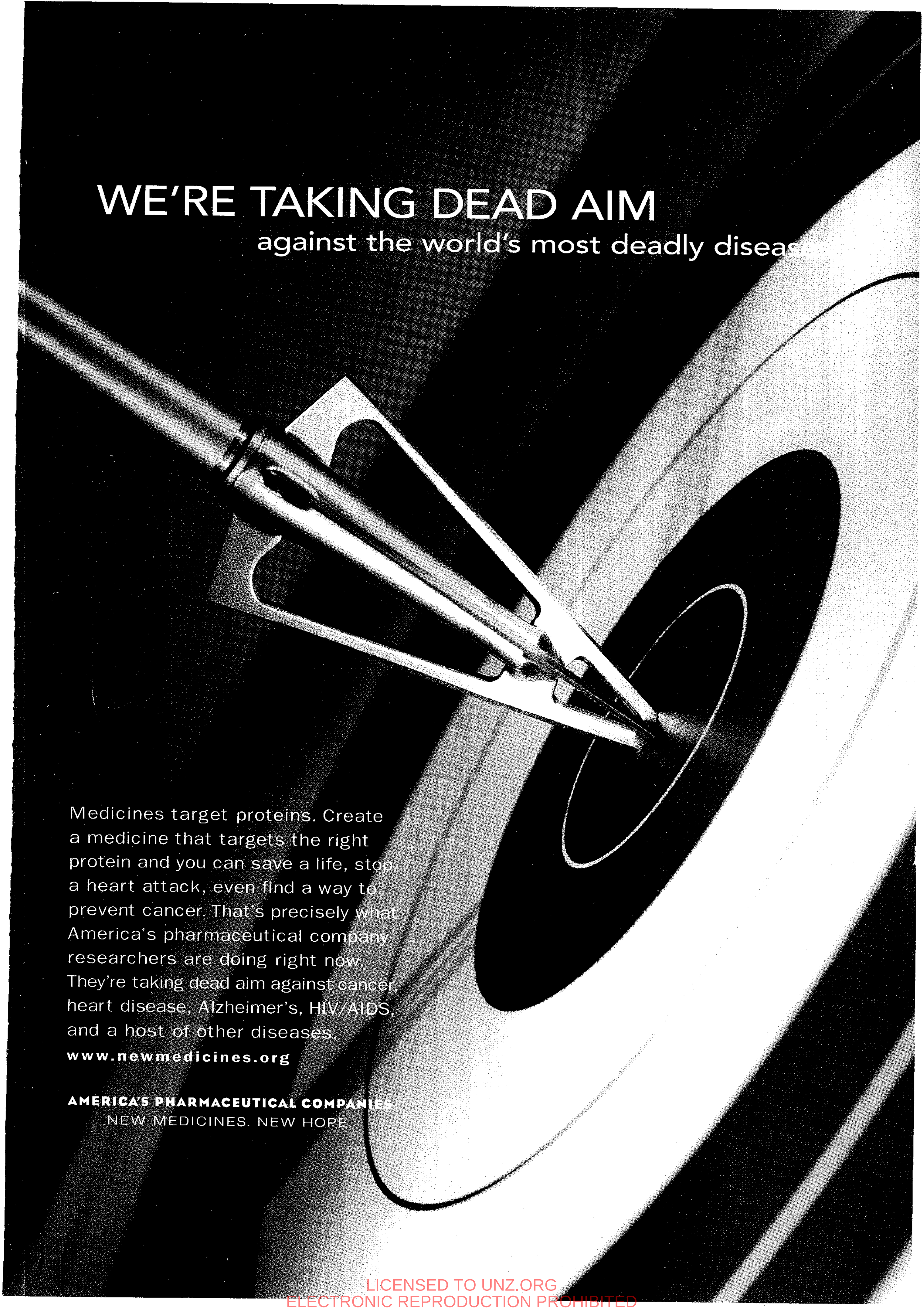
⑫ How can I be hungry? I just had breakfast two hours ago!

⑬ Yes, but it was very unsatisfying.

⑭ There is *no way* I'm as fat as that lady.

⑮ Exit: yesssss!

R. Chast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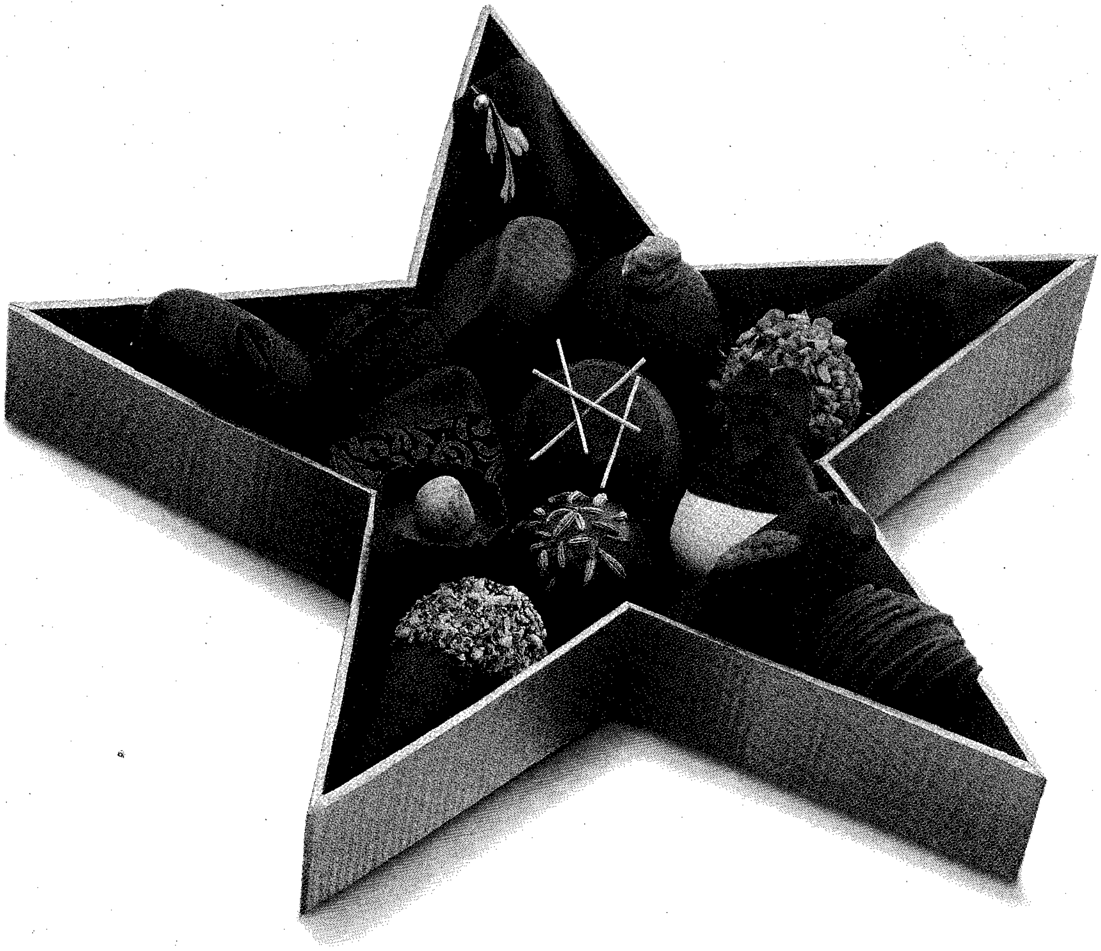

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